The Great Shadow and Beyond the City

By

A. Conan Doyle

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THE GREAT SHADOW

AND

BEYOND THE CITY

BY

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"THE WHITE COMPANY"
"MICAH CLARKE," "ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES GREIG AND PAUL HARDY



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The Great Shadow.

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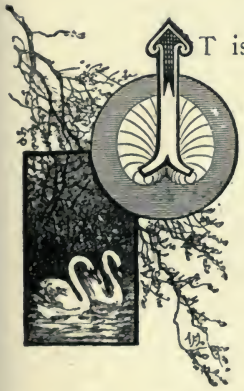
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THE GREAT SHADOW.

CHAPTER I.

The Night of the Beacons.



IT is strange to me, Jock Calder of West Inch, to feel that though now, in the very centre of the nineteenth century, I am but five-and-fifty years of age, and though it is only once in a week perhaps that my wife can pluck out a little grey bristle from over my ear, yet I have lived in a time when the thoughts and the ways of men were as different as though it were another planet from this. For when I walk in my fields I can see, down Berwick way, the little fluffs of white smoke which tell me of this strange new hundred-legged beast, with coals for food and a thousand men in its belly, for ever crawling over the border. On a shiny day I can see the glint of the brass work as it takes the curve near Corriemuir; and then, as I look out to sea, there is the same beast again, or a dozen of them maybe, leaving a trail of black in the air and of white in the water, and swimming in the face of the

wind as easily as a salmon up the Tweed. Such a sight as that would have struck my good old father speechless with wrath as well as surprise; for he was so stricken with the fear of offending the Creator that he was chary of contradicting Nature, and always held the new thing to be nearly akin to the blasphemous. As long as God made the horse, and a man down Birmingham way the engine, my good old dad would have stuck by the saddle and the spurs.

But he would have been still more surprised had he seen the peace and kindliness which reigns now in the hearts of men, and the talk in the papers and at the meetings that there is to be no more war—save, of course, with blacks and such like. For when he died we had been fighting with scarce a break, save only during two short years, for very nearly a quarter of a century. Think of it, you who live so quietly and peacefully now! Babies who were born in the war grew to be bearded men with babies of their own, and still the war continued. Those who had served and fought in their stalwart prime grew stiff and bent, and yet the ships and the armies were struggling. It was no wonder that folk came at last to look upon it as the natural state, and thought how queer it must seem to be at peace. During that long time we fought the Dutch, we fought the Danes, we fought the Spanish, we fought the Turks, we fought the Americans, we fought the Monte-Videans, until it seemed that in this universal struggle no race was too near of kin, or too far away, to be drawn into the quarrel. But most of all it was the French whom we fought, and

the man whom of all others we loathed and feared and admired was the great Captain who ruled them.

It was very well to draw pictures of him, and sing songs about him, and make as though he were an impostor; but I can tell you that the fear of that man hung like a black shadow over all Europe, and that there was a time when the glint of a fire at night upon the coast would set every woman upon her knees and every man gripping for his musket. He had always won: that was the terror of it. The Fates seemed to be behind him. And now we knew that he lay upon the northern coast with a hundred and fifty thousand veterans, and the boats for their passage. But it is an old story, how a third of the grown folk of our country took up arms, and how our little one-eyed, one-armed man crushed their fleet. There was still to be a land of free thinking and free speaking in Europe.

There was a great beacon ready on the hill by Tweedmouth, built up of logs and tar-barrels; and I can well remember how, night after night, I strained my eyes to see if it were ablaze. I was only eight at the time, but it is an age when one takes a grief to heart, and I felt as though the fate of the country hung in some fashion upon me and my vigilance. And then one night as I looked I suddenly saw a little flicker on the beacon hill—a single red tongue of flame in the darkness. I remember how I rubbed my eyes, and pinched myself, and rapped my knuckles against the stone window-sill, to make sure that I was indeed awake. And then the flame shot higher, and I saw the red



quivering line upon the water between; and I dashed into the kitchen, screeching to my father that the French had crossed and the Tweedmouth light was aflame. He had been talking to Mr. Mitchell, the law student from Edinburgh; and I can see him now as he knocked his pipe out at the side of the fire, and looked at me from over the top of his horn spectacles.

"Are you sure, Jock?" says he.

"Sure as death!" I gasped.

He reached out his hand for the Bible upon the table, and opened it upon his knee as though he meant to read to us; but he shut it again in silence, and hurried out. We went too, the law student and I, and followed him down to the gate which opens out upon the highway. From there we could see the red light of the big beacon, and the glimmer of a smaller one to the north of us at Ayton. My mother came down with two plaids to keep the chill from us, and we all stood there until morning, speaking little to each other, and that little in a whisper. The road had more folk on it than ever passed along it at night before; for many of the yeomen up our way had enrolled themselves in the Berwick volunteer regiments, and were riding now as fast as hoof could carry them for the muster. Some had a stirrup cup or two before parting, and I cannot forget one who tore past on a huge white horse, brandishing a great rusty sword in the moonlight. They shouted to us as they passed that the North Berwick Law fire was blazing, and that it was thought that the alarm had come from Edinburgh Castle. There were a few who galloped the other way, couriers for Edinburgh, and the laird's son, and Master Clayton, the deputy sheriff, and such like. And among others there was one a fine built, heavy man on a roan horse, who pulled up at our gate and asked some question about the road. He took off his hat to ease himself, and I saw that he had a kindly long-drawn face, and a great high brow that shot away up into tufts of sandy hair.

"I doubt it 's a false alarm," said he. "Maybe

I 'd ha' done well to bide where I was; but now I 've come so far, I 'll break my fast with the regiment."

He clapped spurs to his horse, and away he went down the brae.

"I ken him weel," said our student, nodding after him. "He 's a lawyer in Edinburgh, and a braw hand at the stringin' of verses. Wattie Scott is his name."

None of us had heard of it then; but it was not long before it was the best known name in Scotland, and many a time we thought of how he speered his way of us on the night of the terror.

But early in the morning we had our minds set at ease. It was grey and cold, and my mother had gone up to the house to mask a pot of tea for us, when there came a gig down the road with Dr. Horscroft of Ayton in it and his son Jim. The collar of the doctor's brown coat came over his ears, and he looked in a deadly black humour; for Jim, who was but fifteen years of age, had trooped off to Berwick at the first alarm with his father's new fowling piece. All night his dad had chased him, and now there he was, a prisoner, with the barrel of the stolen gun sticking out from behind the seat. He looked as sulky as his father, with his hands thrust into his sidepockets, his brows drawn down, and his lower lip thrusting out.

"It 's all a lie!" shouted the doctor as he passed. "There has been no landing, and all the fools in Scotland have been gadding about the roads for nothing."

His son Jim snarled something up at him on

this, and his father struck him a blow with his clenched fist on the side of his head, which sent the boy's chin forward upon his breast as though he had been stunned. My father shook his head, for he had a liking for Jim; but we all walked up to the house again, nodding and blinking, and hardly able to keep our eyes open now that we knew that all was safe, but with a thrill of joy at our hearts such as I have only matched once or twice in my lifetime.

Now all this has little enough to do with what I took my pen up to tell about; but when a man has a good memory and little skill, he cannot draw one thought from his mind without a dozen others trailing out behind it. And yet, now that I come to think of it, this had something to do with it after all; for Jim Horscroft had so deadly a quarrel with his father, that he was packed off to the Berwick Academy, and as my father had long wished me to go there, he took advantage of this chance to send me also.

But before I say a word about this school, I shall go back to where I should have begun, and give you a hint as to who I am; for it may be that these words of mine may be read by some folk beyond the border country who never heard of the Calders of West Inch.

It has a brave sound, West Inch, but it is not a fine estate with a braw house upon it, but only a great hard-bitten, wind-swept sheep run, fringing off into links along the sea-shore, where a frugal man might with hard work just pay his rent and have butter instead of treacle on Sundays. In the centre there is a grey-stoned slate-roofed house with a byre

behind it, and "1703" scrawled in stonework over the lintel of the door. There for more than a hundred years our folk have lived, until, for all their poverty, they came to take a good place among the people; for in the country parts the old yeoman is often better thought of than the new laird.

There was one queer thing about the house of West Inch. It has been reckoned by engineers and other knowing folk that the boundary line between the two countries ran right through the middle of it, splitting our second-best bedroom into an English half and a Scotch half. Now the cot in which I always slept was so placed that my head was to the north of the line and my feet to the south of it. My friends say that if I had chanced to lie the other way my hair might not have been so sandy, nor my mind of so solemn a cast. This I know, that more than once in my life, when my Scotch head could see no way out of a danger, my good thick English legs have come to my help, and carried me clear away. But at school I never heard the end of this, for they would call me "Half-an-half" and "The Great Britain," and sometimes "Union Jack." When there was a battle between the Scotch and English boys, one side would kick my shins and the other cuff my ears, and then they would both stop and laugh as though it were something funny.

At first I was very miserable at the Berwick Academy. Birtwhistle was the first master, and Adams the second, and I had no love for either of them. I was shy and backward by nature, and slow at making a friend either among masters or boys.

It was nine miles as the crow flies, and eleven-and-a-half by road, from Berwick to West-Inch, and my heart grew heavy at the weary distance that separated me from my mother; for, mark you, a lad of that age pretends that he has no need of his mother's caresses, but ah, how sad he is when he is taken at his word! At last I could stand it no longer, and I determined to run away from the school and make my way home as fast as I might. At the very last moment, however, I had the good fortune to win the praise and admiration of every one, from the headmaster downwards, and to find my school life made very pleasant and easy to me. And all this came of my falling by accident out of a second-floor window.

This was how it happened. One evening I had been kicked by Ned Barton, who was the bully of the school; and this injury coming on the top of all my other grievances, caused my little cup to overflow. I vowed that night, as I buried my tear-stained face beneath the blankets, that the next morning would either find me at West Inch or well on the way to it. Our dormitory was on the second floor, but I was a famous climber, and had a fine head for heights. I used to think little, young as I was, of swinging myself with a rope round my thigh off the West Inch gable, and that stood three-and-fifty feet above the ground. There was not much fear then but that I could make my way out of Birtwhistle's dormitory. I waited a weary while until the coughing and tossing had died away, and there was no sound of wakefulness from the long line of wooden cots; then I very softly rose, slipped on my

clothes, took my shoes in my hand, and walked tip-toe to the window. I opened the casement and looked out. Underneath me lay the garden, and close by my hand was the stout branch of a pear tree. An active lad could ask no better ladder. Once in the garden I had but a five foot wall to get over, and there was nothing but distance between me and home. I took a firm grip of a branch with one hand, placed my knee upon another one, and was about to swing myself out of the window, when in a moment I was as silent and as still as though I had been turned to stone.

There was a face looking at me from over the coping of the wall. A chill of fear struck to my heart at its whiteness and its stillness. The moon shimmered upon it, and the eyeballs moved slowly from side to side, though I was hid from them behind the screen of the pear tree. Then in a jerky fashion this white face ascended, until the neck, shoulders, waist, and knees of a man became visible. He sat himself down on the top of the wall, and with a great heave he pulled up after him a boy about my own size, who caught his breath from time to time as though to choke down a sob. The man gave him a shake, with a few rough whispered words, and then the two dropped together down into the garden. I was still standing balanced with one foot upon the bough and one upon the casement, not daring to budge for fear of attracting their attention, for I could hear them moving stealthily about in the long shadow of the house. Suddenly, from immediately beneath my feet, I heard a low grating noise and the sharp tinkle of falling glass.

"That 's done it," said the man's eager whisper. "There is room for you."

"But the edge is all jagged!" cried the other in a weak quaver.

The fellow burst out into an oath that made my skin pringle.

"In with you, you cub," he snarled, "or ——"

I could not see what he did, but there was a short, quick gasp of pain.

"I 'll go! I 'll go!" cried the little lad.

But I heard no more, for my head suddenly swam, my heel shot off the branch, I gave a dreadful yell, and came down, with my ninety-five pounds of weight, right upon the bent back of the burglar. If you ask me, I can only say that to this day I am not quite certain whether it was an accident or whether I designed it. It may be that while I was thinking of doing it Chance settled the matter for me. The fellow was stooping with his head forward thrusting the boy through a tiny window, when I came down upon him just where the neck joins the spine. He gave a kind of whistling cry, dropped upon his face, and rolled three times over, drumming on the grass with his heels. His little companion flashed off in the moonlight, and was over the wall in a trice. As for me, I sat yelling at the pitch of my lungs and nursing one of my legs, which felt as if a red-hot ring were welded round it.

It was not long, as may be imagined, before the whole household, from the headmaster to the stable boy, were out in the garden with lamps and lanterns. The matter was soon cleared: the man carried off upon a shutter, and I borne in much state and

solemnity to a special bedroom, where the small bone of my leg was set by Surgeon Purdie, the younger of the two brothers of that name. As to the robber, it was found that his legs were palsied, and the doctors were of two minds as to whether he would recover the use of them or no; but the Law never gave them a chance of settling the matter, for he was hanged after Carlyle assizes, some six weeks later. It was proved that he was the most desperate rogue in the North of England, for he had done three murders at the least, and there were charges enough against him upon the sheet to have hanged him ten times over.

Well now, I could not pass over my boyhood without telling you about this, which was the most important thing that happened to me. But I will go off upon no more side tracks: for when I think of all that is coming, I can see very well that I shall have more than enough to do before I have finished. For when a man has only his own little private tale to tell, it often takes him all his time; but when he gets mixed up in such great matters as I shall have to speak about, then it is hard on him, if he has not been brought up to it, to get it all set down to his liking. But my memory is as good as ever, thank God, and I shall try to get it all straight before I finish.

It was this business of the burglar that first made a friendship between Jim Horscroft, the doctor's son, and me. He was cock boy of the school from the day he came; for within the hour he had thrown Barton, who had been cock before him, right through the big blackboard in the class-room. Jim always

ran to muscle and bone, and even then he was square and tall, short of speech and long in the arm, much given to lounging with his broad back against walls, and his hands deep in his breeches pockets. I can even recall that he had a trick of keeping a straw in the corner of his mouth, just where he used afterwards to hold his pipe. Jim was always the same for good and for bad since first I knew him.

Heavens, how we all looked up to him! We were but young savages, and had a savage's respect for power. There was Tom Carndale of Appleby, who could write alcaics as well as mere pentameters and hexameters, yet nobody would give a snap for Tom; and there was Willie Earnshaw, who had every date, from the killing of Abel, on the tip of his tongue, so that the masters themselves would turn to him if they were in doubt, yet he was but a narrow-chested lad, over long for his breadth; and what did his dates help him when Jack Simons of the lower third chivied him down the passage with the buckle end of a strap? But you didn't do things like that with Jim Horscroft. What tales we used to whisper about his strength! How he put his fist through the oak-panel of the game-room door; how, when Long Merridew was carrying the ball, he caught up Merridew, ball and all, and ran swiftly past every opponent to the goal. It did not seem fit to us that such a one as he should trouble his head about spondees and dactyls, or care to know who signed the Magna Charta. When he said in open class that King Alfred was the man, we little boys all felt that very likely it was so, and that

perhaps Jim knew more about it than the man who wrote the book.

Well, it was this business of the burglar that drew his attention to me; for he patted me on my head, and said that I was a spunky little devil, which blew me out with pride for a week on end. For two years we were close friends, for all the gap that the years had made between us, and though in passion or in want of thought he did many a thing that galled me, yet I loved him like a brother, and wept as much as would have filled an ink bottle when at last he went off to Edinburgh to study his father's profession. Five years after that did I bide at Birtwhistle's, and when I left I had become cock myself, for I was as wiry and as tough as whalebone, though I never ran to weight and sinew like my great predecessor. It was in Jubilee Year that I left Birtwhistle's, and then for three years I stayed at home learning the ways of the cattle; but still the ships and the armies were wrestling, and still the great shadow of Bonaparte lay across the country. How could I guess that I too should have a hand in lifting that shadow for ever from our people?

CHAPTER II.

Cousin Edie of Eyemouth.

SOME years before, when I was still but a lad, there had come over to us upon a five weeks' visit the only daughter of my father's brother. Willie Calder had settled at Eyemouth as a maker of fishing nets, and he had made more out of twine than ever we were like to do out of the whinbushes and sand-links of West Inch. So his daughter, Edie Calder, came over with a braw red frock and a five shilling bonnet, and a kist full of things that brought my dear mother's eyes out like a parten's. It was wonderful to see her so free with money, and she but a slip of a girl, paying the carrier man all that he asked and a whole twopence over, to which he had no claim. She made no more of drinking ginger-beer than we did of water, and she would have her sugar in her tea and butter with her bread just as if she had been English.

I took no great stock of girls at that time, for it was hard for me to see what they had been made for. There were none of us at Birtwhistle's that thought very much of them; but the smallest laddies seemed to have the most sense, for after they began to grow bigger they were not so sure about it. We little ones were all of one mind: that a creature that couldn't fight and was aye carrying tales, and

couldn't so much as shy a stone without flapping its arm like a rag in the wind, was no use for anything. And then the airs that they would put on, as if they were mother and father rolled into one; for ever breaking into a game with "Jimmy, your toe's come through your boot," or "Go home, you dirty boy, and clean yourself," until the very sight of them was weariness.

So when this one came to the steading at West Inch I was not best pleased to see her. I was twelve at the time (it was in the holidays) and she eleven, a thin, tallish girl with black eyes and the queerest ways. She was for ever staring out in front of her with her lips parted, as if she saw something wonderful; but when I came behind her and looked the same way, I could see nothing but the sheeps' trough or the midden, or father's breeches hanging on a clothes-line. And then if she saw a lump of heather or bracken, or any common stuff of that sort, she would mope over it, as if it had struck her sick, and cry, "How sweet! how perfect!" just as though it had been a painted picture. She didn't like games, but I used to make her play "tig" and such like; but it was no fun, for I could always catch her in three jumps, and she could never catch me, though she would come with as much rustle and flutter as ten boys would make. When I used to tell her that she was good for nothing, and that her father was a fool to bring her up like that, she would begin to cry, and say that I was a rude boy, and that she would go home that very night, and never forgive me as long as she lived. But in five minutes she had forgot all about it. What was strange was that

she liked me a deal better than I did her, and she would never leave me alone; but she was always watching me and running after me, and then saying, "Oh, here you are!" as if it were a surprise.

But soon I found that there was good in her too. She used sometimes to give me pennies, so that once I had four in my pocket all at the same time; but the best part of her was the stories that she could tell. She was sore frightened of frogs, so I would bring one to her, and tell her that I would put it down her neck unless she told a story. That always helped her to begin; but when once she was started it was wonderful how she would carry on. And the things that had happened to her, they were enough to take your breath away. There was a Barbary rover that had been at Eyemouth, and he was coming back in five years in a ship full of gold to make her his wife; and then there was a wandering knight who had been there also, and he had given her a ring which he said he would redeem when the time came. She showed me the ring, which was very like the ones upon my bed curtain; but she said that this one was virgin gold. I asked her what the knight would do if he met the Barbary rover, and she told me that he would sweep his head from his shoulders. What they could all see in her was more than I could think. And then she told me that she had been followed on her way to West Inch by a disguised prince. I asked her how she knew it was a prince, and she said by his disguise. Another day she said that her father was preparing a riddle, and that when it was ready it would be put in the papers, and anyone who guessed it would have half his

fortune and his daughter. I said that I was good at riddles, and that she must send it to me when it was ready. She said it would be in the *Berwick Gazette*, and wanted to know what I would do with her when I won her. I said I would sell her by public roup for what she would fetch; but she would tell no more stories that evening, for she was very techy about some things.

Jim Horscroft was away when Cousin Edie was with us, but he came back the very week she went; and I mind how surprised I was that he should ask any questions or take any interest in a mere lassie. He asked me if she were pretty; and when I said I hadn't noticed, he laughed and called me a mole, and said my eyes would be opened some day. But very soon he came to be interested in something else, and I never gave Edie another thought until one day she just took my life in her hands and twisted it as I could twist this quill.

That was in 1813, after I had left school, when I was already eighteen years of age, with a good forty hairs on my upper lip and every hope of more. I had changed since I left school, and was not so keen on games as I had been, but found myself instead lying about on the sunny side of the braes, with my own lips parted, and my eyes staring just the same as Cousin Edie's used to do. It had satisfied me and filled my whole life that I could run faster and jump higher than my neighbour; but now all that seemed such a little thing, and I yearned, and yearned, and looked up at the big arching sky, and down at the flat blue sea, and felt that there was something wanting, but could never lay my tongue

to what that something was. And I became quick of temper too, for my nerves seemed all of a fret, and when my mother would ask me what ailed me, or my father would speak of my turning my hand to work, I would break into such sharp bitter answers as I have often grieved over since. Ah! a man may have more than one wife, and more than one child, and more than one friend; but he can never have but the one mother, so let him cherish her while he may.

One day when I came in from the sheep, there was my father sitting with a letter in his hands, which was a very rare thing with us, except when the factor wrote for the rent. Then as I came nearer to him I saw that he was crying, and I stood staring, for I had always thought that it was not a thing that a man could do. I can see him now, for he had so deep a crease across his brown cheek that no tear could pass it, but must trickle away sideways and so down to his ear, hopping off on to the sheet of paper. My mother sat beside him and stroked his hands like she did the cat's back when she would soothe it.

"Aye, Jeannie," said he, "poor Willie's gone. It's from the lawyer, and it was sudden or they'd ha' sent word of it. Carbuncle, he says, and a flush o' blood to the head."

"Ah! well, his trouble's over," said my mother.

My father rubbed his ears with the tablecloth.

"He's left a' his savings to his lassie," said he, "and by gom if she's not changed from what she promised to be she'll soon gar them flee. You mind what she said of weak tea under this very roof, and it at seven shillings the pound!"

My mother shook her head, and looked up at the flitches of bacon that hung from the ceiling.

"He doesn't say how much, but she'll have enough and to spare, he says. And she's to come and bide with us, for that was his last wish."

"To pay for her keep!" cried my mother sharply. I was sorry that she should have spoken of money at that moment, but then if she had not been sharp we would all have been on the roadside in a twelvemonth.

"Aye, she'll pay, and she's coming this very day. Jock lad, I'll want you to drive to Ayton and meet the evening coach. Your cousin Edie will be in it, and you can fetch her over to West Inch."

And so off I started at quarter past five with Souter Johnnie, the long-haired fifteen-year-old, and our cart, with the new-painted tail-board that we only used on great days. The coach was in just as I came, and I, like a foolish country lad, taking no heed to the years that had passed, was looking about among the folk in the Inn front for a slip of a girl with her petticoats just under her knees. And as I slouched past and craned my neck there came a touch to my elbow, and there was a lady dressed all in black standing by the steps, and I knew that it was my cousin Edie.

I knew it, I say, and yet had she not touched me I might have passed her a score of times and never known it. My word, if Jim Horscroft had asked me then if she were pretty or no, I should have known how to answer him. She was dark, much darker than is common among our border lasses, and yet with such a faint blush of pink breaking through her dainty colour, like the deeper flush at the heart of a sulphur rose. Her lips were red, and kindly, and



"There came a touch to my elbow . . . it was my cousin Edie."

firm; and even then, at the first glance, I saw that light of mischief and mockery that danced away at the back of her great dark eyes. She took me then and there as though I had been her heritage, put out her hand and plucked me. She was, as I have said, in black, dressed in what seemed to me to be a wondrous fashion, with a black veil pushed up from her brow.

"Ah! Jack," said she, in a mincing English fashion, that she had learned at the boarding school. "No, no, we are rather old for that"—this because I in my awkward fashion was pushing my foolish brown face forward to kiss her, as I had done when I saw her last. "Just hurry up like a good fellow and give a shilling to the conductor, who has been exceedingly civil to me during the journey."

I flushed up red to the ears, for I had only a silver fourpenny piece in my pocket. Never had my lack of pence weighed so heavily upon me as just at that moment. But she read me at a glance, and there in an instant was a little moleskin purse with a silver clasp thrust into my hand. I paid the man, and would have given it back, but she still would have me keep it.

"You shall be my factor, Jack," said she, laughing. "Is this our carriage? How funny it looks! And where am I to sit?"

"On the sacking," said I.

"And how am I to get there?"

"Put your foot on the hub," said I. "I'll help you."

I sprang up and took her two little gloved hands in my own. As she came over the side her breath blew in my face, sweet and warm, and all that

vagueness and unrest seemed in a moment to have been shredded away from my soul. I felt as if that instant had taken me out from myself, and made me one of the race. It took but the time of the flicking of the horse's tail, and yet something had happened, a barrier had gone down somewhere, and I was leading a wider and a wiser life. I felt it all in a flush, but shy and backward as I was, I could do nothing but flatten out the sacking for her. Her eyes were after the coach which was rattling away to Berwick, and suddenly she shook her handkerchief in the air.

"He took off his hat," said she. "I think he must have been an officer. He was very distinguished looking. Perhaps you noticed him—a gentleman on the outside, very handsome, with a brown overcoat."

I shook my head, with all my flush of joy changed to foolish resentment.

"Ah! well, I shall never see him again. Here are all the green braes and the brown winding road just the same as ever. And you, Jack, I don't see any great change in you either. I hope your manners are better than they used to be. You won't try to put any frogs down my back, will you?"

I crept all over when I thought of such a thing.

"We'll do all we can to make you happy at West Inch," said I, playing with the whip.

"I'm sure it's very kind of you to take a poor lonely girl in," said she.

"It's very kind of you to come, Cousin Edie," I stammered. "You'll find it very dull, I fear."

"I suppose it is a little quiet, Jack, eh? Not many men about as I remember it."

"There is Major Elliott, up at Corriemuir. He

comes down of an evening, a real brave old soldier, who had a ball in his knee under Wellington."

"Ah, when I speak of men, Jack, I don't mean old folk with balls in their knees. I meant people of our own age that we could make friends of. By the way, that crabbed old doctor had a son, had he not?"

"Oh yes, that's Jim Horscroft, my best friend."

"Is he at home?"

"No. He'll be home soon. He's still at Edinburgh studying."

"Ah! then we'll keep each other company until he comes, Jack. And I'm very tired, and I wish I was at West Inch."

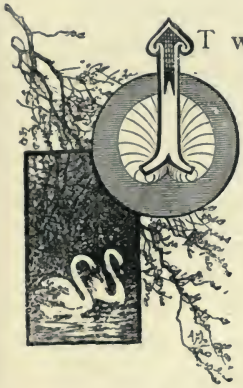
I made old Souter Johnnie cover the ground as he has never done before or since, and in an hour she was seated at the supper table, where my mother had laid out not only butter, but a glass dish of gooseberry jam, which sparkled and looked fine in the candle-light. I could see that my parents were as overcome as I was at the difference in her, though not in the same way. My mother was so set back by the feather thing that she had round her neck that she called her Miss Calder, instead of Edie, until my cousin in her pretty flighty way would lift her forefinger to her whenever she did it. After supper, when she had gone to bed, they could talk of nothing but her looks and her breeding.

"By the way, though," says my father, "it does not look as if she were heart-broke about my brother's death."

And then for the first time I remembered that she had never said a word about the matter since I had met her.

CHAPTER III.

The Shadow on the Waters.



IT was not very long before Cousin Edie was queen of West Inch, and we all her devoted subjects from my father down. She had money and to spare, though none of us knew how much. When my mother said that four shillings the week would cover all that she would cost, she fixed on seven shillings and sixpence of her own free will. The south room, which was the sunniest and had the honeysuckle round the window, was for her; and it was a marvel to see the things that she brought from Berwick to put into it. Twice a week she would drive over, and the cart would not do for her, for she hired a gig from Angus Whitehead, whose farm lay over the hill. And it was seldom that she went without bringing something back for one or other of us. It was a wooden pipe for my father, or a Shetland plaid for my mother, or a book for me, or a brass collar for Rob the collie. There was never a woman more free-handed.

But the best thing that she gave us was just her own presence. To me it changed the whole country-side, and the sun was brighter and the braes greener and the air sweeter from the day she came. Our lives were common no longer now that we spent

them with such a one as she, and the old dull grey house was another place in my eyes since she had set her foot across the door-mat. It was not her face, though that was winsome enough, nor her form, though I never saw the lass that could match her; but it was her spirit, her queer mocking ways, her fresh new fashion of talk, her proud whisk of the dress and toss of the head, which made one feel like the ground beneath her feet, and then the quick challenge in her eye, and the kindly word that brought one up to her level again.

But never quite to her level either. To me she was always something above and beyond. I might brace myself and blame myself, and do what I would, but still I could not feel that the same blood ran in our veins, and that she was but a country lassie, as I was a country lad. The more I loved her the more frightened I was at her, and she could see the fright long before she knew the love. I was uneasy to be away from her, and yet when I was with her I was in a shiver all the time for fear my stumbling talk might weary her or give her offence. Had I known more of the ways of women I might have taken less pains.

"You're a deal changed from what you used to be, Jack," said she, looking at me sideways from under her dark lashes.

"You said not when first we met," says I.

"Ah! I was speaking of your looks then, and of your ways now. You used to be so rough to me, and so masterful, and would have your own way, like the little man that you were. I can see you now with your touzled brown hair and your mischievous

eyes. And now you are so gentle and quiet and soft-spoken."

"One learns to behave," says I.

"Ah, but, Jack, I liked you so much better as you were!"

Well, when she said that I fairly stared at her, for I had thought that she could never have quite forgiven me for the way I used to carry on. That anyone out of a daft house could have liked it, was clean beyond my understanding. I thought of how when she was reading by the door I would go up on the moor with a hazel switch and fix little clay balls at the end of it, and sling them at her until I made her cry. And then I thought of how I caught an eel in the Corriemuir burn and chivied her about with it, until she ran screaming under my mother's apron half mad with fright, and my father gave me one on the ear-hole with the porridge stick which knocked me and my eel under the kitchen dresser. And these were the things that she missed! Well, she must miss them, for my hand would wither before I could do them now. But for the first time I began to understand the queerness that lies in a woman, and that a man must not reason about one, but just watch and try to learn.

We found our level after a time, when she saw that she had just to do what she liked and how she liked, and that I was as much at her beck and call as old Rob was at mine. You'll think I was a fool to have had my head so turned, and maybe I was; but then you must think how little I was used to women, and how much we were thrown together. Besides she was a woman in a million, and I can tell

you that it was a strong head that would not be turned by her.

Why, there was Major Elliott, a man that had buried three wives, and had twelve pitched battles to his name, Edie could have turned him round her finger like a damp rag—she, only new from the boarding school. I met him hobbling from West Inch the first time after she came, with pink in his cheeks and a shine in his eye that took ten years from him. He was cocking up his grey moustaches at either end and curling them into his eyes, and strutting out with his sound leg as proud as a piper. What she had said to him the Lord knows, but it was like old wine in his veins.

"I've been up to see you, laddie," said he, "but I must home again now. My visit has not been wasted, however, as I had an opportunity of seeing *la belle cousine*. A most charming and engaging young lady, laddie."

He had a formal stiff way of talking, and was fond of jerking in a bit of the French, for he had picked some up in the Peninsula. He would have gone on talking of Cousin Edie, but I saw the corner of a newspaper thrusting out of his pocket, and I knew that he had come over, as was his way, to give me some news, for we heard little enough at West Inch.

"What is fresh, major?" I asked.

He pulled the paper out with a flourish.

"The allies have won a great battle, my lad," says he. "I don't think Nap can stand up long against this. The Saxons have thrown him over, and he's been badly beat at Leipzig. Wellington is

past the Pyrenees, and Graham's folk will be at Bayonne before long."

I chucked up my hat.

"Then the war will come to an end at last," I cried.

"Aye, and time too," said he, shaking his head gravely. "It's been a bloody business. But it is hardly worth while for me to say now what was in my mind about you."

"What was that?"

"Well, laddie, you are doing no good here, and now that my knee is getting more limber I was hoping that I might get on active service again. I wondered whether maybe you might like to do a little soldiering under me."

My heart jumped at the thought.

"Aye, would I!" I cried.

"But it'll be clear six months before I'll be fit to pass a board, and it's long odds that Boney will be under lock and key before that."

"And there's my mother," said I, "I doubt she'd never let me go."

"Ah! well, she'll never be asked to now," he answered, and hobbled on upon his way.

I sat down among the heather with my chin on my hand, turning the thing over in my mind, and watching him in his old brown clothes, with the end of a grey plaid flapping over his shoulder, as he picked his way up the swell of the hill. It was a poor life this, at West Inch, waiting to fill my father's shoes, with the same heath, and the same burn, and the same sheep, and the same grey house for ever before me. But over there, over the blue

sea, ah! there was a life fit for a man. There was the Major, a man past his prime, wounded and spent, and yet planning to get to work again, whilst I, with all the strength of my youth, was wasting it upon these hillsides. A hot wave of shame flushed over me, and I sprang up all in a tingle to be off and playing a man's part in the world.

For two days I turned it over in my mind, and on the third there came something which first brought all my resolutions to a head, and then blew them all to nothing like a puff of smoke in the wind.

I had strolled out in the afternoon with Cousin Edie and Rob, until we found ourselves upon the brow of the slope which dips away down to the beach. It was late in the fall, and the links were all bronzed and faded; but the sun still shone warmly, and a south breeze came in little hot pants, rippling the broad blue sea with white curling lines. I pulled an armful of bracken to make a couch for Edie, and there she lay in her listless fashion, happy and contented; for, of all folk that I ever met, she had the most joy from warmth and light. I leaned on a tussock of grass, with Rob's head upon my knee, and there as we sat alone in peace in the wilderness, even there we saw suddenly thrown upon the waters in front of us the shadow of that great man over yonder, who had scrawled his name in red letters across the map of Europe.

There was a ship coming up with the wind, a black sedate old merchantman, bound for Leith as likely as not. Her yards were square and she was running with all sail set. On the other tack, coming

from the north-east, were two great ugly lugger-like craft, with one high mast each, and a big square brown sail. A prettier sight one would not wish than to see the three craft dipping along upon so fair a day. But of a sudden there came a spurt of flame and a whirl of blue smoke from one lugger, then the same from the second, and a rap, rap, rap, from the ship. In a twinkling hell had elbowed out heaven, and there on the waters was hatred and savagery and the lust for blood.

We had sprung to our feet at the outburst, and Edie put her hand all in a tremble upon my arm.

"They are fighting, Jack!" she cried. "What are they? Who are they?"

My heart was thudding with the guns, and it was all that I could do to answer her for the catch of my breath.

"It's two French privateers, Edie," said I, "Chasse-marries, they call them, and yon's one of our merchant ships, and they'll take her as sure as death; for the major says they've always got heavy guns, and are as full of men as an egg is full of meat. Why doesn't the fool make back for Tweedmouth bar?"

But not an inch of canvas did she lower, but floundered on in her stolid fashion, while a little black ball ran up to her peak, and the rare old flag streamed suddenly out from the halliard. Then again came the rap, rap, rap, of her little guns, and the boom, boom of the big carronades in the bows of the lugger. An instant later the three ships met, and the merchantman staggered on like a stag with two wolves hanging to its haunches. The three

became but a dark blurr amid the smoke, with the top spars thrusting out in a bristle, and from the heart of that cloud came the quick red flashes of flame, and such a devils' racket of big guns and small, cheering and screaming, as was to din in my head for many a week. For a stricken hour the hell-cloud moved slowly across the face of the water, and still with our hearts in our mouths we watched the flap of the flag, straining to see if it were yet there. And then suddenly, the ship, as proud and black and high as ever, shot on upon her way; and as the smoke cleared we saw one of the luggers squattering like a broken-winged duck upon the water, and the other working hard to get the crew from her before she sank.

For all that hour I had lived for nothing but the fight. My cap had been whisked away by the wind, but I had never given it a thought. Now with my heart full I turned upon my Cousin Edie, and the sight of her took me back six years. There was the vacant staring eye and the parted lips, just as I had seen them in her girlhood, and her little hands were clenched until the knuckles gleamed like ivory.

"Ah, that captain!" said she, talking to the heath and the whin-bushes. "There is a man, so strong, so resolute! What woman would not be proud of a man like that?"

"Aye, he did well!" I cried with enthusiasm.

She looked at me as if she had forgotten my existence.

"I would give a year of my life to meet such a man," said she. "But that is what living in the

country means. One never sees anybody but just those who are fit for nothing better."

I do not know that she meant to hurt me, though she was never very backward at that; but whatever her intention, her words seemed to strike straight upon a naked nerve.

"Very well, Cousin Edie," I said, trying to speak calmly, "that puts the cap on it. I'll take the bounty in Berwick to-night."

"What, Jack! you be a soldier!"

"Yes, if you think that every man that bides in the country must be a coward."

"Oh, you'd look so handsome in a red coat, Jack, and it improves you vastly when you are in a temper. I wish your eyes would always flash like that, for it looks so nice and manly. But I am sure that you are joking about the soldiering."

"I'll let you see if I am joking."

Then and there I set off running over the moor, until I burst into the kitchen where my mother and father were sitting on either side of the ingle.

"Mother," I cried, "I'm off for a soldier!"

Had I said I was off for a burglar they could not have looked worse over it, for in those days among the decent canny country folks it was mostly the black sheep that were herded by the sergeant. But, my word, those same black sheep did their country some rare service too. My mother put up her mittens to her eyes, and my father looked as black as a peat hole.

"Hoots, Jock, you're daft," says he.

"Daft or no, I'm going."

"Then you'll have no blessing from me."

"Then I'll go without."

At this my mother gives a screech and throws her arms about my neck. I saw her hand, all hard and worn and knuckly with the work she had done for my up-bringing, and it pleaded with me as words could not have done. My heart was soft for her, but my will was as hard as a flint-edge. I put her back in her chair with a kiss, and then ran to my room to pack my bundle. It was already growing dark, and I had a long walk before me, so I thrust a few things together and hastened out. As I came through the side door someone touched my shoulder, and there was Edie in the gloaming.

"Silly boy," said she, "you are not really going."

"Am I not? You 'll see."

"But your father does not wish it, nor your mother."

"I know that."

"Then why go?"

"You ought to know."

"Why, then?"

"Because you make me!"

"I don't want you to go, Jack."

"You said it. You said that the folk in the country were fit for nothing better. You always speak like that. You think no more of me than of those doos in the cot. You think I am nobody at all. I'll show you different."

All my troubles came out in hot little spurts of speech. She coloured up as I spoke, and looked at me in her queer half-mocking, half-petting fashion.

"Oh, I think so little of you as that?" said she.

"And that is the reason why you are going away? Well, then, Jack, will you stay if I am—if I am kind to you?"

We were face to face and close together, and in an instant the thing was done. My arms were round her, and I was kissing her, and kissing her, and kissing her, on her mouth, her cheeks, her eyes, and pressing her to my heart, and whispering to her that she was all, all, to me, and that I could not be without her. She said nothing, but it was long before she turned her face aside, and when she pushed me back it was not very hard.

"Why, you are quite your rude, old, impudent self!" said she, patting her hair with her two hands. "You have tossed me, Jack; I had no idea that you would be so forward!"

But all my fear of her was gone, and a love tenfold hotter than ever was boiling in my veins. I took her up again, and kissed her as if it were my right.

"You are my very own now!" I cried. "I shall not go to Berwick, but I 'll stay and marry you."

But she laughed when I spoke of marriage.

"Silly boy! Silly boy!" said she, with her forefinger up; and then when I tried to lay hands on her again, she gave a little dainty curtsy, and was off into the house.

CHAPTER IV.

The Choosing of Jim.

AND then there came those ten weeks which were like a dream, and are so now to look back upon. I would weary you were I to tell you what passed between us; but oh, how earnest and fateful and all-important it was at the time! Her waywardness; her ever-varying moods, now bright, now dark, like a meadow under drifting clouds; her causeless angers; her sudden repentances, each in turn filling me with joy or sorrow: these were my life, and all the rest was but emptiness. But ever deep down behind all my other feelings was a vague disquiet, a fear that I was like the man who set forth to lay hands upon the rainbow, and that the real Edie Calder, however near she might seem, was in truth for ever beyond my reach.

For she was so hard to understand, or, at least, she was so for a dull-witted country lad like me. For if I would talk to her of my real prospects, and how by taking in the whole of Corriemuir we might earn a hundred good pounds over the extra rent, and maybe be able to build out the parlour at West Inch, so as to make it fine for her when we

married, she would pout her lips and droop her eyes, as though she scarce had patience to listen to me. But if I would let her build up dreams about what I might become, how I might find a paper which proved me to be the true heir of the laird, or how, without joining the army, which she would by no means hear of, I showed myself to be a great warrior until my name was in all folks' mouths, then she would be as blithe as the May. I would keep up the play as well as I could, but soon some luckless word would show that I was only plain Jock Calder of West Inch, and out would come her lip again in scorn of me. So we moved on, she in the air and I on the ground; and if the rift had not come in one way, it must in another.

It was after Christmas, but the winter had been mild, with just frost enough to make it safe walking over the peat bogs. One fresh morning Edie had been out early, and she came back to breakfast with a fleck of colour on her cheeks.

"Has your friend the doctor's son come home, Jack?" says she.

"I heard that it was expected."

"Ah! then it must have been him that I met on the muir."

"What! you met Jim Horscroft?"

"I am sure it must be he. A splendid-looking man—a hero, with curly black hair, a short, straight nose, and grey eyes. He had shoulders like a statue, and as to height, why I suppose that your head, Jack, would come up to his scarf-pin."

"Up to his ear, Edie!" said I, indignantly. "That is, if it was Jim. But tell me. Had he a

brown wooden pipe stuck in the corner of his mouth?"

"Yes, he was smoking. He was dressed in grey, and he has a grand deep strong voice."

"Ho, ho! you spoke to him!" said I.

She coloured a little, as if she had said more than she meant.

"I was going where the ground was a little soft, and he warned me of it," she said.

"Ah! it must have been dear old Jim," said I. "He should have been a doctor years back, if his brains had been as strong as his arm. Why, heart alive, here is the very man himself!"

I had seen him through the kitchen window, and now I rushed out with my half-eaten bannock in my hand to greet him. He ran forward too, with his great hand out and his eyes shining.

"Ah! Jock," he cried, "it's good to see you again. There are no friends like the old ones."

Then suddenly he stuck in his speech, and stared with his mouth open over my shoulder. I turned, and there was Edie, with such a merry, roguish smile, standing in the door. How proud I felt of her, and of myself too, as I looked at her!

"This is my cousin, Miss Edie Calder, Jim," said I.

"Do you often take walks before breakfast, Mr. Horscroft?" she asked, still with that roguish smile.

"Yes," said he, staring at her with all his eyes.

"So do I, and generally over yonder," said she. "But you are not very hospitable to your friend, Jack. If you do not do the honours, I shall have to take your place for the credit of West Inch."

Well, in another minute we were in with the old folk, and Jim had his plate of porridge ladled out for him; but hardly a word would he speak, but sat with his spoon in his hand staring at Cousin Edie. She shot little twinkling glances across at him all the time, and it seemed to me that she was amused at his backwardness, and that she tried by what she said to give him heart.

"Jack was telling me that you were studying to be a doctor," said she. "But oh, how hard it must be, and how long it must take before one can gather so much learning as that!"

"It takes me long enough," Jim answered ruefully; "but I'll beat it yet."

"Ah! but you are brave. You are resolute. You fix your eyes on a point and you move on towards it, and nothing can stop you."

"Indeed, I've little to boast of," said he. "Many a one who began with me has put up his plate years ago, and here am I but a student still."

"That is your modesty, Mr. Horscroft. They say that the bravest are always humble. But then, when you have gained your end, what a glorious career—to carry healing in your hands, to raise up the suffering, to have for one's sole end the good of humanity!"

Honest Jim wriggled in his chair at this.

"I'm afraid I have no such very high motives, Miss Calder," said he. "It's to earn a living, and to take over my father's business, that I do it. If I carry healing in one hand, I have the other out for a crown-piece."

"How candid and truthful you are!" she cried;

and so they went on, she decking him with every virtue, and twisting his words to make him play the part, in the way that I knew so well. Before he was done I could see that his head was buzzing with her beauty and her kindly words. I thrilled with pride to think that he should think so well of my kin.

"Isn't she fine, Jim?" I could not help saying when we stood outside the door, he lighting his pipe before he set off home.

"Fine!" he cried; "I never saw her match!"

"We're going to be married," said I.

The pipe fell out of his mouth, and he stood staring at me. Then he picked it up and walked off without a word. I thought that he would likely come back, but he never did; and I saw him far off up the brae, with his chin on his chest.

But I was not to forget him, for Cousin Edie had a hundred questions to ask me about his boyhood, about his strength, about the women that he was likely to know; there was no satisfying her. And then again, later in the day, I heard of him, but in a less pleasant fashion.

It was my father who came home in the evening with his mouth full of poor Jim. He had been deadly drunk since midday, had been down to Westhouse Links to fight the gipsy champion, and it was not certain that the man would live through the night. My father had met Jim on the highroad, dour as a thundercloud, and with an insult in his eye for every man that passed him. "Guid sakes!" said the old man. "He'll make a fine practice for himsel', if breaking banes will do it."

Cousin Edie laughed at all this, and I laughed

because she did; but I was not so sure that it was funny.

On the third day afterwards, I was going up Corriemuir by the sheep-track, when who should I see striding down but Jim himself. But he was a different man from the big, kindly fellow who had supped his porridge with us the other morning. He had no collar nor tie, his vest was open, his hair matted, and his face mottled, like a man who has drunk heavily overnight. He carried an ash stick, and he slashed at the whin-bushes on either side of the path.

"Why, Jim!" said I.

But he looked at me in the way that I had often seen at school when the devil was strong in him, and when he knew that he was in the wrong, and yet set his will to brazen it out. Not a word did he say, but he brushed past me on the narrow path and swaggered on, still brandishing his ashplant and cutting at the bushes.

Ah well, I was not angry with him. I was sorry, very sorry, and that was all. Of course I was not so blind but that I could see how the matter stood. He was in love with Edie, and he could not bear to think that I should have her. Poor devil, how could he help it? Maybe I should have been the same. There was a time when I should have wondered that a girl could have turned a strong man's head like that, but I knew more about it now.

For a fortnight I saw nothing of Jim Horscroft, and then came the Thursday which was to change the whole current of my life.

I had woke early that day, and with a little thrill

of joy which is a rare thing to feel when a man first opens his eyes. Edie had been kinder than usual the night before, and I had fallen asleep with the thought that maybe at last I had caught the rainbow, and that without any imaginings or make-believes she was learning to love plain, rough Jock Calder of West Inch. It was this thought, still at my heart, which had given me that little morning chirrup of joy. And then I remembered that if I hastened I might be in time for her, for it was her custom to go out with the sunrise.

But I was too late. When I came to her door it was half-open and the room empty. Well, thought I, at least I may meet her and have the homeward walk with her. From the top of Corriemuir hill you may see all the country round; so, catching up my stick, I swung off in that direction. It was bright, but cold, and the surf, I remember, was booming loudly, though there had been no wind in our parts for days. I zigzagged up the steep pathway, breathing in the thin, keen morning air, and humming a lilt as I went, until I came out, a little short of breath, among the whins upon the top. Looking down the long slope of the further side, I saw Cousin Edie, as I had expected; and I saw Jim Horscroft walking by her side.

They were not far away, but too taken up with each other to see me. She was walking slowly, with the little petulant cock of her dainty head which I knew so well, casting her eyes away from him, and shooting out a word from time to time. He paced along beside her, looking down at her and bending his head in the eagerness of his talk. Then as he

said something, she placed her hand with a caress upon his arm, and he, carried off his feet, plucked her up and kissed her again and again. At the sight I could neither cry out nor move, but stood, with a heart of lead and the face of a dead man, staring down at them. I saw her hand passed over his shoulder, and that his kisses were as welcome to her as ever mine had been.

Then he set her down again, and I found that this had been their parting; for, indeed, in another hundred paces they would have come in view of the upper windows of the house. She walked slowly away, with a wave back once or twice, and he stood looking after her. I waited until she was some way off, and then down I came, but so taken up was he, that I was within a hand's-touch of him before he whisked round upon me. He tried to smile as his eye met mine.

"Ah, Jock," says he, "early afoot!"

"I saw you!" I gasped; and my throat had turned so dry that I spoke like a man with a quinsy.

"Did you so?" said he, and gave a little whistle. "Well, on my life, Jock, I'm not sorry. I was thinking of coming up to West Inch this very day, and having it out with you. Maybe it's better as it is."

"You've been a fine friend!" said I.

"Well now, be reasonable, Jock," said he, sticking his hands into his pockets and rocking to and fro as he stood. "Let me show you how it stands. Look me in the eye, and you'll see that I don't lie. It's this way. I had met Edi—Miss Calder that is—before I came that morning, and there were things which made me look upon her as free; and, thinking

that, I let my mind dwell on her. Then you said she wasn't free, but was promised to you, and that was the worst knock I 've had for a time. It clean put me off, and I made a fool of myself for some days, and it 's a mercy I 'm not in Berwick gaol. Then by chance I met her again—on my soul, Jock, it was chance for me,—and when I spoke of you she laughed at the thought. It was cousin and cousin, she said; but as for her not being free, or you being more to her than a friend, it was fool's talk. So you see, Jock, I was not so much to blame, after all: the more so as she promised that she would let you see by her conduct that you were mistaken in thinking that you had any claim upon her. You must have noticed that she has hardly had a word for you for these last two weeks."

I laughed bitterly.

"It was only last night," said I, "that she told me that I was the only man in all this earth that she could ever bring herself to love."

Jim Horscroft put out a shaking hand and laid it on my shoulder, while he pushed his face forward to look into my eyes.

"Jock Calder," said he, "I never knew you tell a lie. You are not trying to score trick against trick, are you? Honest now, between man and man."

"It 's God's truth," said I.

He stood looking at me, and his face had set like that of a man who is having a hard fight with himself. It was a long two minutes before he spoke.

"See here, Jock!" said he. "This woman is fooling us both. D'you hear, man? she 's fooling us both! She loves you at West Inch, and she loves

me on the braeside; and in her devil's heart she cares a whin-blossom for neither of us. Let's join hands, man, and send the hellfire hussy to the right about!"

But this was too much. I could not curse her in my own heart, and still less could I stand by and hear another man do it; not though it was my oldest friend.

"Don't you call names!" I cried.

"Ach! you sicken me with your soft talk! I'll call her what she should be called!"

"Will you, though?" said I, lugging off my coat. "Look you here, Jim Horscroft, if you say another word against her, I'll lick it down your throat, if you were as big as Berwick Castle! Try me and see!"

He peeled off his coat down to the elbows, and then he slowly put it on again.

"Don't be such a fool, Jock!" said he. "Four stone and five inches is more than mortal man can give. Two old friends mustn't fall out over such a—well, there, I won't say it. Well, by the Lord, if she hasn't nerve for ten!"

I looked round, and there she was, not twenty yards from us, looking as cool and easy and placid as we were hot and fevered.

"I was nearly home," said she, "when I saw you two boys very busy talking, so I came all the way back to know what it was about."

Horscroft took a run forward and caught her by the wrist. She gave a little squeal at the sight of his face, but he pulled her towards where I was standing.

"Now, Jock, we've had tomfoolery enough," said he. "Here she is. Shall we take her word as to which she likes? She can't trick us now that we're both together."

"I am willing," said I.

"And so am I. If she goes for you, I swear I'll never so much as turn an eye on her again. Will you do as much for me?"

"Yes, I will."

"Well then, look here, you! We're both honest men, and friends, and we tell each other no lies; and so we know your double ways. I know what you said last night. Jock knows what you said to-day. D'you see? Now then, fair and square! Here we are before you; once and have done. Which is it to be, Jock or me?"

You would have thought that the woman would have been overwhelmed with shame, but instead of that her eyes were shining with delight; and I dare wager that it was the proudest moment of her life. As she looked from one to the other of us, with the cold morning sun glittering on her face, I had never seen her look so lovely. Jim felt it also, I am sure; for he dropped her wrist, and the harsh lines were softened upon his face.

"Come, Edie! which is it to be?" he asked.

"Naughty boys, to fall out like this!" she cried. "Cousin Jack, you know how fond I am of you."

"Oh, then go to him!" said Horscroft.

"But I love nobody but Jim. There is nobody that I love like Jim."

She snuggled up to him, and laid her cheek against his breast.

"You see, Jock!" said he, looking over her shoulder.

I did see; and away I went for West Inch, another man from the time that I left it.



"She snuggled up to him, and laid her cheek against his breast."

CHAPTER V.

The Man from the Sea.

WELL, I was never one to sit groaning over a cracked pot. If it could not be mended, then it is the part of a man to say no more of it. For weeks I had an aching heart; indeed, it is a little sore now, after all these years and a happy marriage, when I think of it. But I kept a brave face on me; and, above all, I did as I had promised that day on the hillside. I was as a brother to her, and no more: though there were times when I had to put a hard curb upon myself; for even now she would come to me with her coaxing ways, and with tales about how rough Jim was, and how happy she had been when I was kind to her; for it was in her blood to speak like that, and she could not help it.

But for the most part Jim and she were happy enough. It was all over the country-side that they were to be married when he had passed his degree, and he would come up to West Inch four nights a week to sit with us. My folk were pleased about it, and I tried to be pleased too.

Maybe at first there was a little coolness between him and me: there was not quite the old schoolboy trust between us. But then, when the first smart was passed, it seemed to me that he had acted openly, and that I had no just cause for complaint

against him. So we were friendly, in a way; and as for her, he had forgotten all his anger, and would have kissed the print of her shoe in the mud. We used to take long rambles together, he and I; and it is about one of these that I now want to tell you.

We had passed over Bramston Heath and round the clump of firs which screens the house of Major Elliott from the sea wind. It was spring now, and the year was a forward one, so that the trees were well leaved by the end of April. It was as warm as a summer day, and we were the more surprised when we saw a huge fire roaring upon the grassplot before the major's door. There was half a fir-tree in it, and the flames were spouting up as high as the bedroom windows. Jim and I stood staring, but we stared the more when out came the major, with a great quart pot in his hand, and at his heels his old sister who kept house for him, and two of the maids, and all four began capering about round the fire. He was a douce, quiet man, as all the country knew, and here he was like old Nick at the carlin's dance, hobbling around and waving his drink above his head. We both set off running, and he waved the more when he saw us coming.

"Peace!" he roared. "Huzza, boys! Peace!"

And at that we both fell to dancing and shouting too; for it had been such a weary war as far back as we could remember, and the shadow had lain so long over us, that it was wondrous to feel that it was lifted. Indeed it was too much to believe, but the major laughed our doubts to scorn.

"Aye, aye, it is true," he cried, stopping with his hand to his side. "The Allies have got Paris, Boney

has thrown up the sponge, and his people are all swearing allegiance to Louis XVIII."

"And the Emperor?" I asked. "Will they spare him?"

"There's talk of sending him to Elba, where he'll be out of mischief's way. But his officers, there are some of them who will not get off so lightly. Deeds have been done during these last twenty years that have not been forgotten. There are a few old scores to be settled. But it's Peace! Peace!"

And away he went once more, with his great tankard, hopping round his bonfire.

Well, we stayed some time with the major, and then away we went down to the beach, Jim and I, talking about this great news, and all that would come of it. He knew a little, and I knew less, but we pieced it all together and talked about how the prices would come down, how our brave fellows would return home, how the ships could go where they would in peace, and how we could pull all the coast beacons down, for there was no enemy now to fear. So we chatted as we walked along the clean, hard sand, and looked out at the old North Sea. How little did Jim know at that moment, as he strode along by my side so full of health and of spirits, that he had reached the extreme summit of his life, and that from that hour all would, in truth, be upon the downward slope!

There was a little haze out to sea; for it had been very misty in the early morning, though the sun had thinned it. As we looked seawards we suddenly saw the sail of a small boat break out

through the fog, and come bobbing along towards the land. A single man was seated in the sheets, and she yawed about as she ran, as though he were of two minds whether to beach her or no. At last, determined it may be by our presence, he made straight for us, and her keel grated upon the shingle at our very feet. He dropped his sail, sprang out, and pulled her bows up on the beach.

"Great Britain, I believe?" said he, turning briskly round and facing us.

He was a man somewhat above middle height, but exceedingly thin. His eyes were piercing and set close together, a long sharp nose jutted out from between them, and beneath them was a bristle of brown moustache as wiry and stiff as a cat's whiskers. He was well dressed in a suit of brown with brass buttons, and he wore high boots which were all roughened and dulled by the sea water. His face and hands were so dark that he might have been a Spaniard, but as he raised his hat to us we saw that the upper part of his brow was quite white and that it was from without that he had his swarthiness. He looked from one to the other of us, and his grey eyes had something in them which I had never seen before. You could read the question; but there seemed to be a menace at the back of it, as if the answer were a right and not a favour.

"Great Britain?" he asked again, with a quick tap of his foot on the shingle.

"Yes," said I, while Jim burst out laughing.

"England? Scotland?"

"Scotland. But it's England past yonder trees."

"*Bon!* I know where I am now. I've been in

a fog without a compass for nearly three days, and I didn't thought I was ever to see land again."

He spoke English glibly enough, but with some strange turn of speech from time to time.

"Where did you come from then?" asked Jim.

"I was in a ship that was wrecked," said he shortly. "What is the town down yonder?"

"It is Berwick."

"Ah! well, I must get stronger before I can go further."

He turned towards the boat, and as he did so he gave a lurch, and would have fallen had he not caught the prow. On this he seated himself and looked round with a face that was flushed, and two eyes that blazed like a wild beast's.

"*Voltigeurs de la Garde!*" he roared in a voice like a trumpet call, and then again "*Voltigeurs de la Garde!*"

He waved his hat above his head, and suddenly pitching forwards upon his face on the sand, he lay all huddled into a little brown heap.

Jim Horscroft and I stood and stared at each other. The coming of the man had been so strange, and his questions, and now this sudden turn. We took him by a shoulder each and turned him upon his back. There he lay with his jutting nose and his cat's whiskers, but his lips were bloodless, and his breath would scarce shake a feather.

"He's dying, Jim!" I cried.

"Aye, for want of food and water. There's not a drop or crumb in the boat. Maybe there's something in the bag."

He sprang and brought out a black leather bag, which with a large blue coat was the only thing in

the boat. It was locked, but Jim had it open in an instant. It was half full of gold pieces.

Neither of us had ever seen so much before—no, nor a tenth part of it. There must have been hundreds of them, all bright new British sovereigns. Indeed, so taken up were we that we had forgotten all about their owner until a groan took our thoughts back to him. His lips were bluer than ever, and his jaw had dropped. I can see his open mouth now, with its row of white wolfish teeth.

"My God, he's off!" cried Jim. "Here, run to the burn, Jock, for a hatful of water. Quick, man, or he's gone! I'll loosen his things the while."

Away I tore, and was back in a minute with as much water as would stay in my Glengarry. Jim had pulled open the man's coat and shirt, and we doused the water over him, and forced some between his lips. It had a good effect; for after a gasp or two he sat up and rubbed his eyes slowly, like a man who is waking from a deep sleep. But neither Jim nor I were looking at his face now, for our eyes were fixed upon his uncovered chest.

There were two deep red puckers in it, one just below the collar bone, and the other about half-way down on the right side. The skin of his body was extremely white up to the brown line of his neck, and the angry crinkled spots looked the more vivid against it. From above I could see that there was a corresponding pucker in the back at one place, but not at the other. Inexperienced as I was, I could tell what that meant. Two bullets had pierced his chest: one had passed through it, and the other had remained inside.

But suddenly he staggered up to his feet, and pulled his shirt to, with a quick suspicious glance at us.

"What have I been doing?" he asked. "I've been off my head. Take no notice of anything I may have said. Have I been shouting?"

"You shouted just before you fell."

"What did I shout?"

I told him, though it bore little meaning to my mind. He looked sharply at us, and then he shrugged his shoulders.

"It's the words of a song," said he. "Well, the question is, What am I to do now? I didn't thought I was so weak. Where did you get the water?"

I pointed towards the burn, and he staggered off to the bank. There he lay down upon his face, and he drank until I thought he would never have done. His long skinny neck was outstretched like a horse's, and he made a loud supping noise with his lips. At last he got up with a long sigh, and wiped his moustache with his sleeve.

"That's better," said he. "Have you any food?"

I had crammed two bits of oat-cake into my pocket when I left home, and these he crushed into his mouth and swallowed. Then he squared his shoulders, puffed out his chest, and patted his ribs with the flat of his hands.

"I am sure that I owe you exceedingly well," said he. "You have been very kind to a stranger. But I see that you have had occasion to open my bag."

"We hoped that we might find wine or brandy there when you fainted."

"Ah! I have nothing there but just a little—how do you say it?—my savings. They are not much, but I must live quietly upon them until I find something to do. Now one could live quietly here, I should say. I could not have come upon a more peaceful place, without perhaps so much as a *gend'arme* nearer than that town?"

"You haven't told us yet who you are, where you come from, nor what you have been," said Jim bluntly.

The stranger looked him up and down with a critical eye:

"My word, but you would make a grenadier for a flank company," said he. "As to what you ask, I might take offence at it from other lips; but you have a right to know, since you have received me with so great courtesy. My name is Bonaventure de Lapp. I am a soldier and a wanderer by trade, and I have come from Dunkirk, as you may see printed upon the boat."

"I thought that you had been shipwrecked," said I.

But he looked at me with the straight gaze of an honest man.

"That is right," said he, "but the ship went from Dunkirk, and this is one of her boats. The crew got away in the longboat, and she went down so quickly that I had no time to put anything into her. That was on Monday."

"And to-day's Thursday. You have been three days without bite or sup."

"It is too long," said he. "Twice before I have been for two days, but never quite so long as this.

Well, I shall leave my boat here, and see whether I can get lodgings in any of these little grey houses upon the hillsides. Why is that great fire burning over yonder?"

"It is one of our neighbours who has served against the French. He is rejoicing because peace has been declared."

"Oh, you have a neighbour who has served then! I am glad; for I, too, have seen a little soldiering here and there."

He did not look glad, but he drew his brows down over his keen eyes.

"You are French, are you not?" I asked, as we all walked up the hill together, he with his black bag in his hand and his long blue cloak slung over his shoulder.

"Well, I am of Alsace," said he; "and, you know, they are more German than French. For myself, I have been in so many lands that I feel at home in all. I have been a great traveller; and where do you think that I might find a lodging?"

I can scarcely tell now, on looking back with the great gap of five-and-thirty years between, what impression this singular man had made upon me. I distrusted him, I think, and yet I was fascinated by him also; for there was something in his bearing, in his look, and his whole fashion of speech which was entirely unlike anything that I had ever seen. Jim Horscroft was a fine man, and Major Elliott was a brave one, but they both lacked something that this wanderer had. It was the quick alert look, the flash of the eye, the nameless distinction which is so hard to fix. And then we

had saved him when he lay gasping upon the shingle, and one's heart always softens towards what one has once helped.

"If you will come with me," said I, "I have little doubt that I can find you a bed for a night or two, and by that time you will be better able to make your own arrangements."

He pulled off his hat, and bowed with all the grace imaginable. But Jim Horscroft pulled me by the sleeve, and led me aside.

"You're mad, Jock," he whispered. "The fellow's a common adventurer. What do you want to get mixed up with him for?"

But I was as obstinate a man as ever laced his boots, and if you jerked me back it was the finest way of sending me to the front.

"He's a stranger, and it's our part to look after him," said I.

"You'll be sorry for it," said he.

"Maybe so."

"If you don't think of yourself, you might think of your cousin."

"Edie can take very good care of herself."

"Well, then, the devil take you, and you may do what you like!" he cried, in one of his sudden flashes of anger. Without a word of farewell to either of us, he turned off upon the track that led up towards his father's house.

Bonaventure de Lapp smiled at me as we walked on together.

"I didn't thought he liked me very much," said he. "I can see very well that he has made a quarrel with you because you are taking me to your home.

What does he think of me then? Does he think perhaps that I have stole the gold in my bag, or what is it that he fears?"

"Tut, I neither know nor care," said I. "No stranger shall pass our door without a crust and a bed."

With my head cocked and feeling as if I was doing something very fine, instead of being the most egregious fool south of Edinburgh, I marched on down the path with my new acquaintance at my elbow.

CHAPTER VI.

A Wandering Eagle.



MY father seemed to be much of Jim Horscroft's opinion; for he was not over warm to this new guest, and looked him up and down with a very questioning eye. He set a dish of vinegared herrings before him, however, and I noticed that he looked more askance than ever when my companion ate nine of them, for two were always our portion. When at last he had finished Bonaventure de Lapp's lids were drooping over his eyes, for I doubt that he had been sleepless as well as foodless for these three days. It was but a poor room to which I had led him, but he threw himself down upon the couch, wrapped his big blue cloak around him, and was asleep in an instant. He was a very high and strong snorer, and, as my room was next to his, I had reason to remember that we had a stranger within our gates.

When I came down in the morning I found that he had been beforehand with me; for he was seated opposite my father at the window-table in the kitchen, their heads almost touching, and a little roll of gold pieces between them. As I came in my father looked up at me, and I saw a light of greed in his eyes such as I had never seen before. He caught up the money with an eager clutch and swept it into his pocket.

"Very good, mister," said he; "the room's yours, and you pay always on the third of the month."

"Ah! and here is my first friend," cried de Lapp, holding out his hand to me with a smile which was kindly enough, and yet had that touch of patronage which a man uses when he smiles to his dog. "I am myself again now, thanks to my excellent supper and good night's rest. Ah! it is hunger that takes the courage from a man. That most, and cold next."

"Aye, that's right," said my father; "I've been out on the moors in a snowdrift for six-and-thirty hours, and ken what it's like."

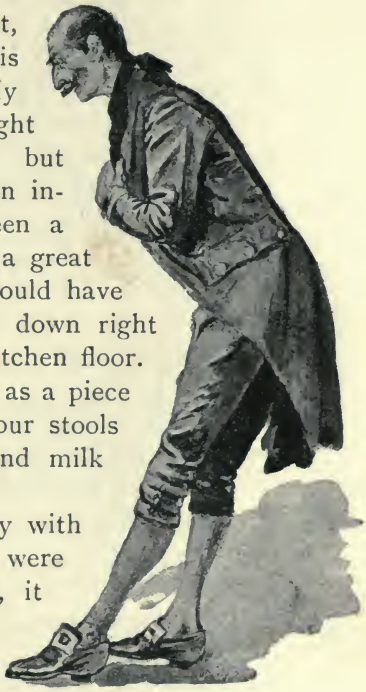
"I once saw three thousand men starve to death," remarked de Lapp, putting out his hands to the fire. "Day by day they got thinner and more like apes, and they did come down to the edge of the pontoons where we did keep them, and they howled with rage and pain. The first few days their howls went over the whole city, but after a week our sentries on the bank could not hear them, so weak they had fallen."

"And they died!" I exclaimed.

"They held out a very long time. Austrian Grenadiers they were, of the corps of Starowitz, fine stout men as big as your friend of yesterday; but when the town fell there were but four hundred alive, and a man could lift them three at a time as if they were little monkeys. It was a pity. Ah! my friend, you will do me the honours with madame and with mademoiselle."

It was my mother and Edie who had come into

the kitchen. He had not seen them the night before, but now it was all I could do to keep my face as I watched him; for instead of our homely Scottish nod, he bent up his back like a louping trout, and slid his foot, and clapped his hand over his heart in the queerest way. My mother stared, for she thought he was making fun of her; but Cousin Edie fell into it in an instant, as though it had been a game, and away she went in a great curtsy until I thought she would have had to give it up, and sit down right there in the middle of the kitchen floor. But no, she up again as light as a piece of fluff, and we all drew up our stools and started on the scones and milk and porridge.



He had a wonderful way with women, that man. Now if I were to do it, or Jim Horscroft, it would look as if we were playing the fool, and the girls would have laughed at us; but with him it seemed to go with his style of face and fashion of speech, so that one came at last to look for it: for when he spoke to my mother or Cousin Edie—and he was never backward in speaking—it would always be with a bow and a look as if it would hardly be worth their while to listen to what he had to say, and when they answered he would put on a face as though

every word they said was to be treasured up and remembered for ever. And yet, even while he humbled himself to a woman, there was always a proud sort of look at the back of his eye as if he meant to say that it was only to them that he was so meek, and that he could be stiff enough upon occasion. As to my mother, it was wonderful the way she softened to him, and in half-an-hour she had told him all about her uncle, who was a surgeon in Carlisle, and the highest of any upon her side of the house. She spoke to him about my brother Rob's death, which I had never heard her mention to a soul before, and he looked as if the tears were in his eyes over it—he, who had just told us how he had seen three thousand men starved to death! As to Edie, she did not say much, but she kept shooting little glances at our visitor, and once or twice he looked very hard at her.

When he had gone to his room after breakfast, my father pulled out eight golden pounds and laid them on the table.

"What think ye of that, Martha?" said he.

"You've sold the twa black tups after all."

"No, but it's a month's pay for board and lodging from Jock's friend, and as much to come every four weeks."

But my mother shook her head when she heard it.

"Two pounds a week is over much," said she; "and it is not when the poor gentleman is in distress that we should put such a price on his bit food."

"Tut!" cried my father, "he can very well afford it, and he with a bag full of gold. Besides, it's his own proposing."

"No blessing will come from that money," said she.

"Why, woman, he's turned your head wi' his foreign ways of speech!" cried my father.

"Aye, and it would be a good thing if Scottish men had a little more of that kindly way," she said, and that was the first time in all my life that I had heard her answer him back.

He came down soon and asked me whether I would come out with him. When we were in the sunshine he held out a little cross made of red stones, one of the bonniest things that ever I had set eyes upon.

"These are rubies," said he, "and I got it at Tudela, in Spain. There were two of them, but I gave the other to a Lithuanian girl. I pray that you will take this as a memory of your exceedingly kindness to me yesterday. It will fashion into a pin for your cravat."

I could but thank him for the present, which was of more value than anything I had ever owned in my life.

"I am off to the upper muir to count the lambs," said I; "maybe you would care to come up with me and see something of the country?"

He hesitated for a moment, and then he shook his head.

"I have some letters," he said, "which I ought to write as soon as possible. I think that I will stay at quiet this morning and get them written."

All forenoon I was wandering over the links, and you may imagine that my mind was turning all the time upon this strange man whom chance had drifted

to our doors. Where did he gain that style of his, that manner of command, that haughty menacing glint of the eye? And his experiences to which he referred so lightly, how wonderful the life must have been which had put him in the way of them! He had been kind to us, and gracious of speech, but still I could not quite shake myself clear of the distrust with which I had regarded him. Perhaps, after all, Jim Horscroft had been right and I had been wrong about taking him to West Inch.

When I got back he looked as though he had been born and bred in the steading. He sat in the big wooden-armed ingle-chair, with the black cat on his knee. His arms were out, and he held a skein of worsted from hand to hand which my mother was busily rolling into a ball. Cousin Edie was sitting near, and I could see by her eyes that she had been crying.

"Hullo, Edie!" said I, "what's the trouble?"

"Ah! mademoiselle, like all good and true women, has a soft heart," said he. "I didn't thought it would have moved her, or I should have been silent. I have been talking of the suffering of some troops of which I knew something when they were crossing the Guadarama mountains in the winter of 1808. Ah! yes, it was very bad, for they were fine men and fine horses. It is strange to see men blown by the wind over the precipices, but the ground was so slippery and there was nothing to which they could hold. So companies all linked arms, and they did better in that fashion; but one artilleryman's hand came off as I held it, for he had had the frost-bite for three days."

I stood staring with my mouth open.

"And the old Grenadiers, too, who were not so active as they used to be, they could not keep up; and yet if they lingered the peasants would catch them and crucify them to the barn doors with their feet up and a fire under their heads, which was a pity for these fine old soldiers. So when they could go no further, it was interesting to see what they would do; for they would sit down and say their prayers, sitting on an old saddle, or their knapsacks, maybe, and then take off their boots and their stockings, and lean their chin on the barrel of their musket. Then they would put their toe on the trigger, and *pouf!* it was all over, and there was no more marching for those fine old Grenadiers. Oh, it was very rough work up there on those Guadarama mountains!"

"And what army was this?" I asked.

"Oh, I have served in so many armies that I mix them up sometimes. Yes, I have seen much of war. Apropos I have seen your Scotchmen fight, and very stout fantassins they make, but I thought from them that the folk over here all wore—how do you say it?—petticoats."

"Those are the kilts, and they wear them only in the Highlands."

"Ah! on the mountains. But there is a man out yonder. Maybe he is the one who your father said would carry my letters to the post."

"Yes, he is Farmer Whitehead's man. Shall I give them to him?"

"Well, he would be more careful of them if he had them from your hand."

He took them from his pocket and gave them over to me. I hurried out with them, and as I did so my eyes fell upon the address of the topmost one. It was written very large and clear :

à S. Majesté,
Le Roi du Suède,
Stockholm.

I did not know very much French, but I had enough to make that out. What sort of eagle was this which had flown into our humble little nest ?

CHAPTER VII.

The Corriemuir Peel Tower.



ELL, it would weary me, and I am very sure that it would weary you also, if I were to attempt to tell you how life went with us after this man came under our roof, or the way in which he gradually came to win the affections of every one of us. With the women it was quick work enough: but soon he had thawed my father too, which was no such easy matter, and had gained Jim Horscroft's goodwill as well as my own. Indeed, we were but two great boys beside him, for he had been everywhere and seen everything; and of an evening he would chatter away in his limping English until he took us clean from the plain kitchen and the little farm steading, to plunge us into courts and camps and battlefields and all the wonders of the world. Horscroft had been sulky enough with him at first; but de Lapp, with his tact and his easy ways, soon drew him round, until he had quite won his heart, and Jim would sit with Cousin Edie's hand in his, and the two be quite lost in listening to all that he had to tell us. I will not tell you all this; but even now, after so long an interval, I can trace how, week by week and month by month, by this word and that deed, he moulded us all as he wished.

One of his first acts was to give my father the

boat in which he had come, reserving only the right to have it back in case he should have need of it. The herring were down on the coast that autumn, and my uncle before he died had given us a fine set of nets, so the gift was worth many a pound to us. Sometimes de Lapp would go out in the boat alone, and I have seen him for a whole summer day rowing slowly along and stopping every half-dozen strokes to throw over a stone at the end of a string. I could not think what he was doing until he told me of his own freewill.

"I am fond of studying all that has to do with the military," said he, "and I never lose a chance. I was wondering if it would be a difficult matter for the commander of an army corps to throw his men ashore here."

"If the wind were not from the east," said I.

"Ah! quite so, if the wind were not from the east. Have you taken soundings here?"

"No."

"Your line of battleships would have to lie outside; but there is water enough for a forty-gun frigate right up within musket range. Cram your boats with tirailleurs, deploy them behind these sandhills, then back with the launches for more, and a stream of grape over their heads from the frigates. It could be done! it could be done!"

His moustaches bristled out more like a cat's than ever, and I could see by the flash of his eyes that he was carried away by his dream.

"You forget that our soldiers would be upon the beach," said I indignantly.

"Ta, ta, ta!" he cried. "Of course it takes

two sides to make a battle. Let us see now; let us work it out. What could you get together? Shall we say twenty, thirty thousand. A few regiments of good troops: the rest, *pouf!*—conscripts, bourgeois with arms. How do you call them—volunteers?"

"Brave men!" I shouted.

"Oh yes, very brave men, but imbecile. Ah, *mon Dieu*, it is incredible how imbecile they would be! Not they alone, I mean, but all young troops. They are so afraid of being afraid that they would take no precaution. Ah, I have seen it! In Spain I have seen a battalion of conscripts attack a battery of ten pieces. Up they went, ah, so gallantly! and presently the hillside looked, from where I stood, like—how do you say it in English?—a raspberry tart. And where was our fine battalion of conscripts? Then another battalion of young troops tried it, all together in a rush, shouting and yelling; but what will shouting do against a mitraille of grape? And there was our second battalion laid out on the hillside. And then the foot chasseurs of the Guard, old soldiers, were told to take the battery; and there was nothing fine about their advance—no column, no shouting, nobody killed—just a few scattered lines of tirailleurs and pelotons of support; but in ten minutes the guns were silenced, and the Spanish gunners cut to pieces. War must be learned, my young friend, just the same as the farming of sheep."

"Pooh!" said I, not to be outcrowed by a foreigner. "If we had thirty thousand men on the line of the hill yonder, you would come to be very glad that you had your boats behind you."

"On the line of the hill?" said he, with a flash of his eyes along the ridge. "Yes, if your man knew his business he would have his left about your house, his centre on Corriemuir, and his right over near the doctor's house, with his tirailleurs pushed out thickly in front. His horse, of course, would try to cut us up as we deployed on the beach. But once let us form, and we should soon know what to do. There's the weak point, there at the gap. I would sweep it with my guns, then roll in my cavalry, push the infantry on in grand columns, and that wing would find itself up in the air. Eh, Jack, where would your volunteers be?"

"Close at the heels of your hindmost man," said I; and we both burst out into the hearty laugh with which such discussions usually ended.

Sometimes when he talked I thought he was joking, and at other times it was not quite so easy to say. I well remember one evening that summer, when he was sitting in the kitchen with my father, Jim, and me, after the women had gone to bed, he began about Scotland and its relation to England.

"You used to have your own king and your own laws made at Edinburgh," said he. "Does it not fill you with rage and despair when you think that it all comes to you from London now?"

Jim took his pipe out of his mouth.

"It was we who put our king over the English; so if there's any rage, it should have been over yonder," said he.

This was clearly news to the stranger, and it silenced him for the moment.

"Well, but your laws are made down there, and surely that is not good," he said at last.

"No, it would be well to have a Parliament back in Edinburgh," said my father; "but I am kept so busy with the sheep that I have little enough time to think of such things."

"It is for fine young men like you two to think of it," said de Lapp. "When a country is injured, it is to its young men that it looks to avenge it."

"Aye! the English take too much upon themselves sometimes," said Jim.

"Well, if there are many of that way of thinking about, why should we not form them into battalions and march them upon London?" cried de Lapp.

"That would be a rare little picnic," said I, laughing. "And who would lead us?"

He jumped up, bowing, with his hand on his heart, in his queer fashion.

"If you will allow me to have the honour!" he cried; and then seeing that we were all laughing, he began to laugh also, but I am sure that there was really no thought of a joke in his mind.

I could never make out what his age could be, nor could Jim Horscroft either. Sometimes we thought that he was an oldish man that looked young, and at others that he was a youngish man who looked old. His brown, stiff, close-cropped hair needed no cropping at the top, where it thinned away to a shining curve. His skin too was intersected by a thousand fine wrinkles, lacing and interlacing, and was all burned, as I have already said, by the sun. Yet he was as lithe as a boy, and he was as tough as whalebone, walking all day over the

hills or rowing on the sea without turning a hair. On the whole we thought that he might be about forty or forty-five, though it was hard to see how he could have seen so much of life in the time. But one day we got talking of ages, and then he surprised us.

I had been saying that I was just twenty, and Jim said that he was twenty-seven.

"Then I am the most old of the three," said de Lapp.

We laughed at this, for by our reckoning he might almost have been our father.

"But not by so much," said he, arching his brows. "I was nine-and-twenty in December."

And it was this even more than his talk which made us understand what an extraordinary life it must have been that he had led. He saw our astonishment, and laughed at it.

"I have lived! I have lived!" he cried. "I have spent my days and my nights. I led a company in a battle where five nations were engaged when I was but fourteen. I made a king turn pale at the words I whispered in his ear when I was twenty. I had a hand in re-making a kingdom and putting a fresh king upon a great throne the very year that I came of age. *Mon Dieu*, I have lived my life!"

That was the most that I ever heard him confess of his past life, and he only shook his head and laughed when we tried to get something more out of him. There were times when we thought that he was but a clever impostor; for what could a man of such influence and talents be loitering here in Ber-

wickshire for? But one day there came an incident which showed us that he had indeed a history in the past.

You will remember that there was an old officer of the Peninsula who lived no great way from us, the same who danced round the bonfire with his sister and the two maids. He had gone up to London on some business about his pension and his wound money, and the chance of having some work given him, so that he did not come back until late in the autumn. One of the first days after his return he came down to see us, and there for the first time he clapped eyes upon de Lapp. Never in my life did I look upon so astonished a face, and he stared at our friend for a long minute without so much as a word. De Lapp looked back at him equally hard, but there was no recognition in his eyes.

"I do not know who you are, sir," he said at last; "but you look at me as if you had seen me before."

"So I have," answered the major.

"Never to my knowledge."

"But I'll swear it."

"Where then?"

"At the village of Astorga, in the year '8."

De Lapp started, and stared again at our neighbour.

"*Mon Dieu*, what a chance!" he cried. "And you were the English parliamentaire? I remember you very well indeed, sir. Let me have a whisper in your ear."

He took him aside and talked very earnestly with

him in French for a quarter of an hour, gesticulating with his hands, and explaining something, while the major nodded his old grizzled head from time to time. At last they seemed to come to some agreement, and I heard the major say "*Parole d'honneur*" several times, and afterwards "*Fortune de la guerre*," which I could very well understand, for they gave you a fine upbringing at Birtwhistle's. But after that I always noticed that the major never used the same free fashion of speech that we did towards our lodger, but bowed when he addressed him, and treated him with a wonderful deal of respect. I asked the major more than once what he knew about him, but he always put if off, and I could get no answer out of him.

Jim Horscroft was at home all that summer, but late in the autumn he went back to Edinburgh again for the winter session, and as he intended to work very hard and get his degree next spring if he could, he said that he would bide up there for the Christmas. So there was a great leave-taking between him and Cousin Edie; and he was to put up his plate and to marry her as soon as he had the right to practice. I never knew a man love a woman more fondly than he did her, and she liked him well enough in a way —for, indeed, in the whole of Scotland she would not find a finer-looking man—but when it came to marriage, I think she winced a little at the thought that all her wonderful dreams should end in nothing more than in being the wife of a country surgeon. Still there was only me and Jim to choose out of, and she took the best of us.

Of course there was de Lapp also; but we always

felt that he was of an altogether different class to us, and so he didn't count. I was never very sure at that time whether Edie cared for him or not. When Jim was at home they took little notice of each other. After he was gone they were thrown more together, which was natural enough, as he had taken up so much of her time before. Once or twice she spoke to me about de Lapp as though she did not like him, and yet she was uneasy if he were not in in the evening; and there was no one so fond of his talk, or with so many questions to ask him, as she. She made him describe what queens wore, and what sort of carpets they walked on, and whether they had hairpins in their hair, and how many feathers they had in their hats, until it was a wonder to me how he could find an answer to it all. And yet an answer he always had; and was so ready and quick with his tongue, and so anxious to amuse her, that I wondered how it was that she did not like him better.

Well, the summer and the autumn and the best part of the winter passed away, and we were still all very happy together. We got well into the year 1815, and the great Emperor was still eating his heart out at Elba; and all the ambassadors were wrangling together at Vienna as to what they should do with the lion's skin, now that they had so fairly hunted him down. And we in our little corner of Europe went on with our petty peaceful business, looking after the sheep, attending the Berwick cattle fairs, and chatting at night round the blazing peat fire. We never thought that what all these high and mighty people were doing could have any bearing upon us; and as to war, why everybody was agreed

that the great shadow was lifted from us for ever, and that, unless the Allies quarrelled among themselves, there would not be a shot fired in Europe for another fifty years.

There was one incident, however, that stands out very clearly in my memory. I think that it must have happened about the February of this year, and I will tell it to you before I go any further.

You know what the border Peel castles are like, I have no doubt. They were just square heaps built every here and there along the line, so that the folk might have some place of protection against raiders and mosstroopers. When Percy and his men were over the Marches, then the people would drive some of their cattle into the yard of the tower, shut up the big gate, and light a fire in the brazier at the top, which would be answered by all the other Peel towers, until the lights would go twinkling up to the Lammermuir Hills, and so carry the news on to the Pentlands and to Edinburgh. But now, of course, all these old keeps were warped and crumbling, and made fine nesting places for the wild birds. Many a good egg have I had for my collection out of the Corriemuir Peel Tower.

One day I had been a very long walk, away over to leave a message at the Laidlaw Armstrongs, who live two miles on this side of Ayton. About five o'clock, just before the sun set, I found myself on the brae path, with the gable end of West Inch peeping up in front of me and the old Peel tower lying on my left. I turned my eyes on the keep, for it looked so fine with the flush of the level sun beating full upon it and the blue sea stretching out behind; and as I

stared, I suddenly saw the face of a man twinkle for a moment in one of the holes in the wall.

Well, I stood and wondered over this, for what could anybody be doing in such a place now that it was too early for the nesting season? It was so queer that I was determined to come to the bottom of it; so, tired as I was, I turned my shoulder on home, and walked swiftly towards the tower. The grass stretches right up to the very base of the wall, and my feet made little noise until I reached the crumbling arch where the old gate used to be. I peeped through, and there was Bonaventure de Lapp standing inside the keep, and peeping out through the very hole at which I had seen his face. He was turned half away from me, and it was clear that he had not seen me at all, for he was staring with all his eyes over in the direction of West Inch. As I advanced my foot rattled the rubble that lay in the gateway, and he turned round with a start and faced me.

He was not a man whom you could put out of countenance, and his face changed no more than if he had been expecting me there for a twelvemonth; but there was something in his eyes which let me know that he would have paid a good price to have me back on the brae path again.

"Hullo!" said I, "what are you doing here?"

"I may ask you that," said he.

"I came up because I saw your face at the window."

"And I because, as you may well have observed, I have very much interest for all that has to do with the military, and, of course, castles are among them,

You will excuse me for one moment, my dear Jack."

And he stepped out suddenly through the hole in the wall, so as to be out of my sight.

But I was very much too curious to excuse him so easily. I shifted my ground swiftly to see what it was that he was after. He was standing outside, and waving his hand frantically, as in a signal.

"What are you doing?" I cried; and then, running out to his side, I looked across the moors to see whom he was beckoning to.

"You go too far, sir," said he, angrily; "I didn't thought you would have gone so far. A gentleman has the freedom to act as he choose without your being the spy upon him. If we are to be friends, you must not interfere in my affairs."

"I don't like these secret doings," said I, "and my father would not like them either."

"Your father can speak for himself, and there is no secret," said he, curtly. "It is you with your imaginings that make a secret. Ta, ta, ta! I have no patience with such foolishness."

And without as much as a nod, he turned his back upon me, and started walking swiftly to West Inch.

Well, I followed him, and in the worst of tempers; for I had a feeling that there was some mischief in the wind, and yet I could not for the life of me think what it all meant. Again I found myself puzzling over the whole mystery of this man's coming, and of his long residence among us. And whom could he have expected to meet at the Peel Tower? Was the fellow a spy, and was it

some brother spy who came to speak with him there? But that was absurd. What could there be to spy about in Berwickshire? And besides, Major Elliott knew all about him, and he would not show him such respect if there were anything amiss.

I had just got as far as this in my thoughts when I heard a cheery hail, and there was the major himself coming down the hill from his house, with his big bulldog Bounder held in leash. This dog was a savage creature, and had caused more than one accident on the country-side; but the major was very fond of it, and would never go out without it, though he kept it tied with a good thick thong of leather. Well, just as I was looking at the major, waiting for him to come up, he stumbled with his lame leg over a branch of gorse, and in recovering himself he let go his hold of the leash, and in an instant there was the beast of a dog flying down the hillside in my direction.

I did not like it, I can tell you; for there was neither stick nor stone about, and I knew that the brute was dangerous. The major was shrieking to it from behind, and I think that the creature thought that he was hallooing it on, so furiously did it rush. But I knew its name, and I thought that maybe that might give me the privileges of acquaintanceship; so as it came at me with bristling hair and its nose screwed back between its two red eyes, I cried out "Bounder! Bounder!" at the pitch of my lungs. It had its effect, for the beast passed me with a snarl, and flew along the path on the traces of Bonaventure de Lapp.

He turned at the shouting, and seemed to take in the whole thing at a glance; but he strolled along as slowly as ever. My heart was in my mouth for him, for the dog had never seen him before; and I ran as fast as my feet would carry me to drag it away from him. But somehow, as it bounded up and saw the twittering finger and thumb which de Lapp held out behind him, its fury died suddenly away, and we saw it wagging its thumb of a tail and clawing at his knee.

"Your dog then, major?" said he, as its owner came hobbling up. "Ah, it is a fine beast—a fine, pretty thing!"

The major was blowing hard, for he had covered the ground nearly as fast as I.

"I was afraid lest he might have hurt you," he panted.

"Ta, ta, ta!" cried de Lapp. "He is a pretty, gentle thing; I always love the dogs. But I am glad that I have met you, major; for here is this young gentleman, to whom I owe very much, who has begun to think that I am a spy. Is it not so, Jack?"

I was so taken aback by his words that I could not lay my tongue to an answer, but coloured up and looked askance, like the awkward country lad that I was.

"You know me, major," said de Lapp, "and I am sure that you will tell him that this could not be."

"No, no, Jack! Certainly not! certainly not!" cried the major.

"Thank you," said de Lapp. "You know me,

and you do me justice. And yourself, I hope that your knee is better, and that you will soon have your regiment given you."

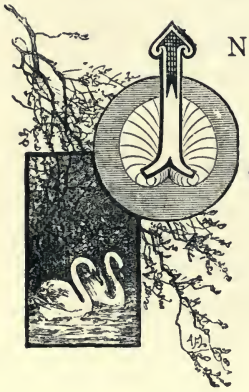
"I am well enough," answered the major; "but they will never give me a place unless there is war, and there will be no more war in my time."

"Oh, you think that!" said de Lapp with a smile. "Well, *nous verrons!* We shall see, my friend!"

He whisked off his hat, and turning briskly he walked off in the direction of West Inch. The major stood looking after him with thoughtful eyes, and then asked me what it was that had made me think that he was a spy. When I told him he said nothing, but shook his head, and looked like a man who was ill at ease in his mind.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Coming of the Cutter.



NEVER felt quite the same to our lodger after that little business at the Peel Castle. It was always in my mind that he was holding a secret from me—indeed, that he was all a secret together, seeing that he always hung a veil over his past. And when by chance that veil was for an instant whisked away, we always caught a glimpse of something bloody and violent and dreadful upon the other side. The very look of his body was terrible. I bathed with him once in the summer, and I saw then that he was haggled with wounds all over. Besides seven or eight scars and slashes, his ribs on one side were all twisted out of shape, and a part of one of his calves had been torn away. He laughed in his merry way when he saw my face of wonder.

"Cossacks! Cossacks!" said he, running his hand over his scars. "And the ribs were broke by an artillery tumbril. It is very bad to have the guns pass over one. Now with cavalry it is nothing. A horse will pick its steps however fast it may go. I have been ridden over by fifteen hundred cuirassiers and by the Russian hussars of Grodno, and I had no harm from that. But guns are very bad."

"And the calf?" I asked.

"*Pouf!* It is only a wolf bite," said he. "You would not think how I came by it! You will understand that my horse and I had been struck, the horse killed, and I with my ribs broken by the tumbril. Well, it was cold—oh, bitter, bitter!—the ground like iron, and no one to help the wounded, so that they froze into such shapes as would make you smile. I too felt that I was freezing, so what did I do? I took my sword, and I opened my dead horse, so well as I could, and I made space in him for me to lie, with one little hole for my mouth. *Sapristi!* It was warm enough there. But there was not room for the entire of me, so my feet and part of my legs stuck out. Then in the night, when I slept, there came the wolves to eat the horse, and they had a little pinch of me also, as you can see; but after that I was on guard with my pistols, and they had no more of me. There I lived, very warm and nice, for ten days."

"Ten days!" I cried. "What did you eat?"

"Why, I ate the horse. It was what you call board and lodging to me. But of course I have sense to eat the legs, and live in the body. There were many dead about who had all their water bottles, so I had all I could wish. And on the eleventh day there came a patrol of light cavalry, and all was well."

It was by such chance chats as these—hardly worth repeating in themselves,—that there came light upon himself and his past. But the day was coming when we should know all; and how it came I shall try now to tell you.

The winter had been a dreary one, but with March came the first signs of spring, and for a week on end we had sunshine and winds from the south. On the 7th Jim Horscroft was to come back from Edinburgh; for though the session ended with the 1st, his examination would take him a week. Edie and I were out walking on the sea beach on the 6th, and I could talk of nothing but my old friend—for, indeed, he was the only friend of my own age that I had at that time. Edie was very silent, which was a rare thing with her; but she listened smiling to all that I had to say.

"Poor old Jim!" said she once or twice under her breath. "Poor old Jim!"

"And if he has passed," said I, "why, then of course he will put up his plate and have his own house, and we shall be losing our Edie."

I tried to make a jest of it and to speak lightly, but the words still stuck in my throat.

"Poor old Jim!" said she again, and there were tears in her eyes as she said it. "And poor old Jock!" she added, slipping her hand into mine as we walked. "You cared for me a little bit once also, didn't you, Jock? Oh, is not that a sweet little ship out yonder!"

It was a dainty cutter of about thirty tons, very swift by the rake of her masts and the lines of her bow. She was coming up from the south under jib, foresail, and mainsail; but even as we watched her all her white canvas shut suddenly in, like a kittiwake closing her wings, and we saw the splash of her anchor just under the bowsprit. She may have been rather less than a quarter of a mile from the

shore—so near that I could see a tall man with a peaked cap, who stood at the quarter with a telescope to his eye, sweeping it backwards and forwards along the coast.

"What can they want here?" asked Edie.

"They are rich English from London," said I; for that was how we explained everything that was above our comprehension in the border counties. We stood for the best part of an hour watching the bonny craft, and then, as the sun was lying low on a cloudbank and there was a nip in the evening air, we turned back to West Inch.

As you come to the farmhouse from the front, you pass up a garden, with little enough in it, which leads out by a wicket-gate to the road; the same gate at which we stood on the night when the beacons were lit, the night that we saw Walter Scott ride past on his way to Edinburgh. On the right of this gate, on the garden side, was a bit of a rockery which was said to have been made by my father's mother many years before. She had fashioned it out of water-worn stones and sea shells, with mosses and ferns in the chinks. Well, as we came in through the gates my eyes fell upon this stone heap, and there was a letter stuck in a cleft stick upon the top of it. I took a step forward to see what it was, but Edie sprang in front of me, and plucking it off she thrust it into her pocket.

"That's for me," said she, laughing.

But I stood looking at her with a face which drove the laugh from her lips.

"Who is it from, Edie?" I asked.

She pouted, but made no answer.



"Who is it from, woman?" I cried. "Is it possible that you have been as false to Jim as you were to me?"

"How rude you are, Jock!" she cried. "I do wish that you would mind your own business."

"There is only one person that it could be from," I cried. "It is from this man de Lapp!"

"And suppose that you are right, Jock?"

The coolness of the woman amazed and enraged me.

"You confess it!" I cried. "Have you, then, no shame left?"

"Why should I not receive letters from this gentleman?"

"Because it is infamous."

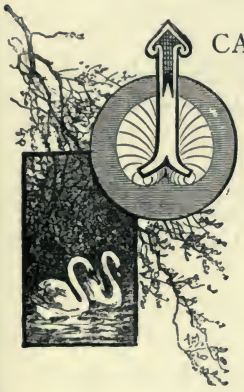
"And why?"

"Because he is a stranger."

"On the contrary," said she, "he is my husband!"

CHAPTER IX.

The Doings at West Inch.



CAN remember that moment so well. I have heard from others that a great, sudden blow has dulled their senses. It was not so with me. On the contrary, I saw and heard and thought more clearly than I had ever done before. I can remember that my eyes caught a little knob of marble as broad as my palm, which was imbedded in one of the grey stones of the rockery, and I found time to admire its delicate mottling. And yet the look upon my face must have been strange, for Cousin Edie screamed, and leaving me she ran off to the house. I followed her and tapped at the window of her room, for I could see that she was there.

"Go away, Jock, go away!" she cried. "You are going to scold me! I won't be scolded! I won't open the window! Go away!"

But I continued to tap.

"I must have a word with you!"

"What is it, then?" she cried, raising the sash about three inches. "The moment you begin to scold I shall close it."

"Are you really married, Edie?"

"Yes, I am married."

"Who married you?"

"Father Brennan, at the Roman Catholic Chapel at Berwick."

"And you a Presbyterian?"

"He wished it to be in a Catholic Church."

"When was it?"

"On Wednesday week."

I remembered then that on that day she had driven over to Berwick, while de Lapp had been away on a long walk, as he said, among the hills.

"What about Jim?" I asked.

"Oh, Jim will forgive me!"

"You will break his heart and ruin his life."

"No, no; he will forgive me!"

"He will murder de Lapp! Oh, Edie, how could you bring such disgrace and misery upon us?"

"Ah, now you are scolding!" she cried, and down came the window.

I waited some little time, and tapped, for I had much still to ask her; but she would return no answer, and I thought that I could hear her sobbing. At last I gave it up; and I was about to go into the house, for it was nearly dark now, when I heard the click of the garden gate. It was de Lapp himself.

But as he came up the path he seemed to me to be either mad or drunk. He danced as he walked, cracked his fingers in the air, and his eyes blazed like two will-o'-the-wisps. "*Voltigeurs!*" he shouted; "*Voltigeurs de la Garde!*" just as he had done when he was off his head; and then suddenly, "*En avant! en avant!*" and up he came, waving his walking-cane over his head. He stopped short when he saw me

looking at him, and I daresay he felt a bit ashamed of himself.

"Hola, Jock!" he cried. "I didn't thought anybody was there. I am in what you call the high spirits to-night."

"So it seems!" said I, in my blunt fashion. "You may not feel so merry when my friend Jim Horscroft comes back to-morrow."

"Ah! he comes back to-morrow, does he? And why should I not feel merry?"

"Because, if I know the man, he will kill you."

"Ta, ta, ta!" cried de Lapp. "I see that you know of our marriage. Edie has told you. Jim may do what he likes."

"You have given us a nice return for having taken you in."

"My good fellow," said he, "I have, as you say, given you a very nice return. I have taken Edie from a life which is unworthy of her, and I have connected you by marriage with a noble family. However, I have some letters which I must write to-night, and the rest we can talk over to-morrow, when your friend Jim is here to help us."

He stepped towards the door.

"And this was whom you were awaiting at the Peel Tower!" I cried, seeing light suddenly.

"Why, Jock, you are becoming quite sharp," said he, in a mocking tone; and an instant later I heard the door of his room close and the key turn in the lock.

I thought that I should see him no more that night; but a few minutes later he came into the kitchen, where I was sitting with the old folk.

"Madame," said he, bowing down with his hand over his heart, in his own queer fashion, "I have met with much kindness in your hands, and it shall always be in my heart. I didn't thought I could have been so happy in the quiet country as you have made me. You will accept this small souvenir; and you also, sir, you will take this little gift, which I have the honour to make to you."

He put two little paper packets down upon the table at their elbows, and then, with three more bows to my mother, he walked from the room.

Her present was a brooch, with a green stone set in the middle and a dozen little shining white ones all round it. We had never seen such things before, and did not know how to set a name to them; but they told us afterwards at Berwick that the big one was an emerald and the others were diamonds, and that they were worth much more than all the lambs we had that spring. My dear old mother has been gone now this many a year, but that bonny brooch sparkles at the neck of my eldest daughter when she goes out into company; and I never look at it that I do not see the keen eyes and the long thin nose and the cat's whiskers of our lodger at West Inch. As to my father, he had a fine gold watch with a double case; and a proud man was he as he sat with it in the palm of his hand, his ear stooping to hearken to the tick. I do not know which was best pleased, and they would talk of nothing but what de Lapp had given them.

"He's given you something more," said I at last.

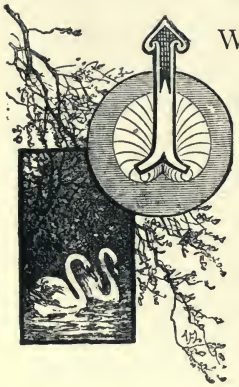
"What then, Jock?" asked father.

"A husband for Cousin Edie," said I.

They thought I was daffing when I said that; but when they came to understand that it was the real truth, they were as proud and as pleased as if I had told them that she had married the laird. Indeed, poor Jim, with his hard drinking and his fighting, had not a very bright name on the country-side, and my mother had often said that no good could come of such a match. Now, de Lapp was, for all we knew, steady and quiet and well-to-do. And as to the secrecy of it, secret marriages were very common in Scotland at that time, when only a few words were needed to make man and wife, so nobody thought much of that. The old folk were as pleased, then, as if their rent had been lowered; but I was still sore at heart, for it seemed to me that my friend had been cruelly dealt with, and I knew well that he was not a man who would easily put up with it.

CHAPTER X.

The Return of the Shadow.



WOKE with a heavy heart the next morning, for I knew that Jim would be home before long, and that it would be a day of trouble. But how much trouble that day was to bring, or how far it would alter the lives of us, was more than I had ever thought in my darkest moments. But let me tell you it all, just in the order that it happened.

I had to get up early that morning; for it was just the first flush of the lambing, and my father and I were out on the moors as soon as it was fairly light. As I came out into the passage a wind struck upon my face, and there was the house door wide open, and the grey light drawing another door upon the inner wall. And when I looked again there was Edie's room open also, and de Lapp's too; and I saw in a flash what that giving of presents meant upon the evening before. It was a leave-taking, and they were gone.

My heart was bitter against Cousin Edie as I stood looking into her room. To think that for the sake of a new-comer she could leave us all without one kindly word, or as much as a handshake. And he, too! I had been afraid of what would happen when Jim met him; but now there seemed to be

something cowardly in this avoidance of him. I was angry and hurt and sore, and I went out into the open without a word to my father, and climbed up on to the moors to cool my flushed face.

When I got up to Corriemuir I caught my last glimpse of Cousin Edie. The little cutter still lay where she had anchored, but a rowboat was pulling out to her from the shore. In the stern I saw a flutter of red, and I knew that it came from her shawl. I watched the boat reach the yacht and the folk climb on to her deck. Then the anchor came up, the white wings spread once more, and away she dipped right out to sea. I still saw that little red spot on the deck, and de Lapp standing beside her. They could see me also, for I was outlined against the sky, and they both waved their hands for a long time, but gave it up at last when they found that I would give them no answer.

I stood with my arms folded, feeling as glum as ever I did in my life, until their cutter was only a square hickering patch of white among the mists of the morning. It was breakfast time and the porridge upon the table before I got back, but I had no heart for the food. The old folk had taken the matter coolly enough, though my mother had no word too hard for Edie; for the two had never had much love for each other, and less of late than ever.

"There's a letter here from him," said my father, pointing to a note folded up on the table; "it was in his room. Maybe you would read it to us."

They had not even opened it; for, truth to tell,

neither of the good folk were very clever at reading ink, though they could do well with a fine large print.

It was addressed in big letters to "The Good People of West Inch;" and this was the note, which lies before me all stained and faded as I write:

"My friends,—I didn't thought to have left you so suddenly, but the matter was in other hands than mine. Duty and honour have called me back to my old comrades. This you will doubtless understand before many days are past. I take your Edie with me as my wife; and it may be that in some more peaceful time you will see us again at West Inch. Meanwhile, accept the assurance of my affection, and believe me that I shall never forget the quiet months which I spent with you, at the time when my life would have been worth a week at the utmost had I been taken by the Allies. But the reason of this you may also learn some day.

"Yours,

"Bonaventure de Lissac

"(Colonel des Voltigeurs de la Garde, et aide-de-camp de S.M.I. l'Empereur Napoleon)."

I whistled when I came to those words written under his name; for though I had long made up my mind that our lodger could be none other than one of those wonderful soldiers of whom we had heard so much, who had forced their way into every capital of Europe, save only our own, still I had little thought that our roof covered Napoleon's own aide-de-camp and a colonel of his Guard.

"So," said I, "de Lissac is his name, and not de Lapp. Well, colonel or no, it is as well for him that he got away from here before Jim laid hands

upon him. And time enough, too," I added, peeping out at the kitchen window, "for here is the man himself coming through the garden."

I ran to the door to meet him, feeling that I would have given a deal to have him back in Edinburgh again. He came running, waving a paper over his head; and I thought that maybe he had a note from Edie, and that it was all known to him. But as he came up I saw that it was a big, stiff, yellow paper which crackled as he waved it, and that his eyes were dancing with happiness.

"Hurrah, Jock!" he shouted. "Where is Edie? Where is Edie?"

"What is it, man?" I asked.

"Where is Edie?"

"What have you there?"

"It's my diploma, Jock. I can practise when I like. It's all right. I want to show it to Edie."

"The best you can do is to forget all about Edie," said I.

Never have I seen a man's face change as his did when I said those words.

"What! What d'ye mean, Jock Calder?" he stammered.

He let go his hold of the precious diploma as he spoke, and away it went over the hedge and across the moor, where it stuck flapping on a whin-bush; but he never so much as glanced at it. His eyes were bent upon me, and I saw the devil's spark glimmer up in the depths of them.

"She is not worthy of you," said I.

He gripped me by the shoulder.

"What have you done?" he whispered. "This is some of your hanky-panky! Where is she?"

"She's off with that Frenchman who lodged here."

I had been casting about in my mind how I could break it gently to him; but I was always backward in speech, and I could think of nothing better than this.

"Oh!" said he, and stood nodding his head and looking at me, though I knew very well that he could neither see me, nor the steading, nor anything else. So he stood for a minute or more, with his hands clenched and his head still nodding. Then he gave a gulp in his throat, and spoke in a queer dry, rasping voice.

"When was this?" said he.

"This morning."

"Were they married?"

"Yes."

He put his hand against the doorpost to steady himself.

"Any message for me?"

"She said that you would forgive her."

"May God blast my soul on the day I do! Where have they gone to?"

"To France, I should judge."

"His name was de Lapp, I think?"

"His real name is de Lissac; and he is no less than a colonel in Boney's guards."

"Ah! he would be in Paris, likely. That is well! That is well!"

"Hold up!" I shouted. "Father! Father! Bring the brandy!"

His knees had given way for an instant, but he was himself again before the old man came running with the bottle.

"Take it away!" said he.

"Have a soop, Mister Horscroft," cried my father, pressing it upon him. "It will give you fresh heart!"

He caught hold of the bottle and sent it flying over the garden hedge.

"It 's very good for those who wish to forget," said he; "I am going to remember!"

"May God forgive you for sinfu' waste!" cried my father aloud.

"And for well-nigh braining an officer of his Majesty's infantry!" said old Major Elliott, putting his head over the hedge. "I could have done with a nip after a morning's walk, but it is something new to have a whole bottle whizz past my ear. But what is amiss, that you all stand round like mutes at a burying?"

In a few words I told him our trouble, while Jim, with a grey face and his brows drawn down, stood leaning against the doorpost. The major was as glum as we by the time I had finished, for he was fond both of Jim and of Edie.

"Tut, tut!" said he. "I feared something of the kind ever since that business of the Peel Tower. It 's the way with the French. They can't leave the women alone. But, at least, de Lissac has married her, and that 's a comfort. But it 's no time now to think of our own little troubles, with all Europe in a roar again, and another twenty years' war before us, as like as not."

"What d'ye mean?" I asked.

"Why, man, Napoleon's back from Elba, his troops have flocked to him, and Louis has run for his life. The news was in Berwick this morning."

"Great Lord!" cried my father. "Then the weary business is all to do over again!"

"Aye, we thought we were out from the shadow, but it's still there. Wellington is ordered from Vienna to the Low Countries, and it is thought that the Emperor will break out first on that side. Well, it's a bad wind that blows nobody any good. I've just had news that I am to join the 71st as senior major."

I shook hands with our good neighbour on this, for I knew how it had lain upon his mind that he should be a cripple, with no part to play in the world.

"I am to join my regiment as soon as I can; and we shall be over yonder in a month, and in Paris, maybe, before another one is over."

"By the Lord, then, I 'm with you, major!" cried Jim Horscroft. "I'm not too proud to carry a musket, if you will put me in front of this Frenchman."

"My lad, I'd be proud to have you serve under me," said the major. "And as to de Lissac, where the Emperor is he will be."

"You know the man," said I. "What can you tell us of him?"

"There is no better officer in the French army, and that is a big word to say. They say that he would have been a marshal, but he preferred to stay at the Emperor's elbow. I met him two days before Corunna, when I was sent with a flag to speak about our wounded. He was with Soult then. I knew him again when I saw him."

"And I will know him again when I see him," said Horscroft, with the old dour look on his face.

And then at that instant, as I stood there, it was

suddenly driven home to me how poor and purposeless a life I should lead while this crippled friend of ours and the companion of my boyhood were away in the forefront of the storm. Quick as a flash, my resolution was taken.

"I'll come with you too, major," I cried.

"Jock! Jock!" said my father, wringing his hands.

Jim said nothing, but put his arm half round me and hugged me. The major's eyes shone and he flourished his cane in the air.

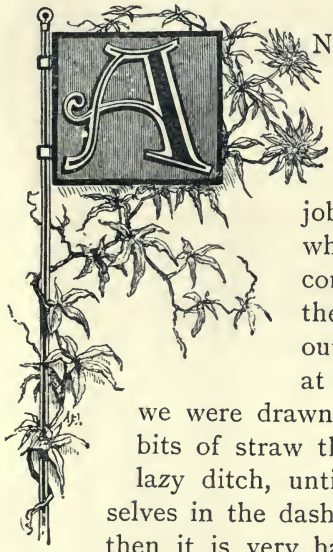
"My word, but I shall have two good recruits at my heels," said he. "Well, there's no time to be lost, so you must both be ready for the evening coach."



And this was what a single day brought about; and yet years pass away so often without a change. Just think of the alteration in that four-and-twenty hours. De Lissac was gone. Edie was gone. Napoleon had escaped. War had broken out. Jim Horscroft had lost everything, and he and I were setting out to fight against the French. It was all like a dream, until I tramped off to the coach that evening, and looked back at the grey farm steading and at the two little dark figures: my mother with her face sunk in her Shetland shawl, and my father waving his drover's stick to hearten me upon my way.

CHAPTER XI.

The Gathering of the Nations.



AND now I come to a bit of my story that clean takes my breath away as I think of it, and makes me wish that I had never taken the job of telling it in hand. For when I write I like things to come slow and orderly and in their turn, like sheep coming out of a paddock. So it was at West Inch. But now that we were drawn into a larger life, like wee bits of straw that float slowly down some lazy ditch, until they suddenly find themselves in the dash and swirl of a great river; then it is very hard for me with my simple words to keep pace with it all. But you can find the cause and reason of everything in the books about history, and so I shall just leave that alone and talk about what I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears.

The regiment to which our friend had been appointed was the 71st Highland Light Infantry, which wore the red coat and the trews, and had its depôt in Glasgow town. There we went, all three, by coach; the major in great spirits and full of stories about the Duke and the Peninsula, while Jim

sat in the corner with his lips set and his arms folded, and I knew that he killed de Lissac three times an hour in his heart. I could tell it by the sudden glint of his eyes and grip of his hand. As to me, I did not know whether to be glad or sorry; for home is home, and it is a weary thing, however you may brazen it out, to feel that half Scotland is between you and your mother.

We were in Glasgow next day, and the major took us down to the depôt, where a soldier with three stripes on his arm and a fistful of ribbons from his cap, showed every tooth he had in his head at the sight of Jim, and walked three times round him to have the view of him, as if he had been Carlisle Castle. Then he came over to me and punched me in the ribs and felt my muscle, and was nigh as pleased as with Jim.

"These are the sort, major, these are the sort," he kept saying. "With a thousand of these we could stand up to Boney's best."

"How do they run?" asked the major.

"A poor show," said he, "but they may lick into shape. The best men have been drafted to America, and we are full of Militiamen and recruities."

"Tut, tut!" said the major. "We'll have old soldiers and good ones against us. Come to me if you need any help, you two."

And so with a nod he left us, and we began to understand that a major who is your officer is a very different person from a major who happens to be your neighbour in the country.

Well, well, why should I trouble you with these things? I could wear out a good quill-pen just

writing about what we did, Jim and I, at the depôt in Glasgow; and how we came to know our officers and our comrades, and how they came to know us. Soon came the news that the folk of Vienna, who had been cutting up Europe as if it had been a jigget of mutton, had flown back, each to his own country, and that every man and horse in their armies had their faces towards France. We heard of great reviews and musterings in Paris too, and then that Wellington was in the Low Countries, and that on us and on the Prussians would fall the first blow. The Government was shipping men over to him as fast as they could, and every port along the east coast was choked with guns and horses and stores. On the third of June we had our marching orders also, and on the same night we took ship from Leith, reaching Ostend the night after. It was my first sight of a foreign land, and indeed most of my comrades were the same, for we were very young in the ranks. I can see the blue waters now and the curling surf line, and the long yellow beach, and queer windmills twisting and turning—a thing that a man would not see from one end of Scotland to the other. It was a clean, well-kept town, but the folk were under-sized, and there was neither ale nor oatmeal cakes to be bought amongst them.

From there we went on to a place called Bruges; and from there to Ghent, where we picked up with the 52nd and the 95th, which were the two regiments that we were brigaded with. It 's a wonderful place for churches and stonework is Ghent, and indeed of all the towns we were in there was scarce one but had a finer kirk than any in Glasgow. From there

we pushed on to Ath, which is a little village on a river, or a burn rather, called the Dender. There we were quartered—in tents mostly, for it was fine sunny weather—and the whole brigade set to work at its drill from morning till evening. General Adams was our chief, and Reynell was our colonel, and they were both fine old soldiers; but what put heart into us most was to think that we were under the Duke, for his name was like a bugle call. He was at Brussels with the bulk of the army, but we knew that we should see him quick enough if he were needed.

I had never seen so many English together, and indeed I had a kind of contempt for them, as folk always have if they live near a border. But the two regiments that were with us now were as good comrades as could be wished. The 52nd had a thousand men in the ranks, and there were many old soldiers of the Peninsula among them. They came from Oxfordshire for the most part. The 95th were a rifle regiment, and had dark green coats instead of red. It was strange to see them loading, for they would put the ball into a greasy rag and then hammer it down with a mallet, but they could fire both further and straighter than we. All that part of Belgium was covered with British troops at that time; for the Guards were over near Enghien, and there were cavalry regiments on the further side of us. You see, it was very necessary that Wellington should spread out all his force, for Boney was behind the screen of his fortresses, and of course we had no means of saying on what side he might pop out, except that he was pretty sure to come the way that

we least expected him. On the one side he might get between us and the sea, and so cut us off from England; and on the other he might shove in between the Prussians and ourselves. But the Duke was as clever as he, for he had his horse and his light troops all round him, like a great spider's web, so that the moment a French foot stepped across the border he could close up all his men at the right place.

For myself, I was very happy at Ath, and I found the folk very kindly and homely. There was a farmer of the name of Bois, in whose fields we were quartered, and who was a real good friend to many of us. We built him a wooden barn among us in our spare time, and many a time I and Job Seaton, my rear-rank man, have hung out his washing, for the smell of the wet linen seemed to take us both straight home as nothing else could do. I have often wondered whether that good man and his wife are still living, though I think it hardly likely, for they were of a hale middle-age at the time. Jim would come with us too, sometimes, and would sit with us smoking in the big Flemish kitchen, but he was a different Jim now to the old one. He had always had a hard touch in him, but now his trouble seemed to have turned him to flint, and I never saw a smile upon his face, and seldom heard a word from his lips. His whole mind was set on revenging himself upon de Lissac for having taken Edie from him, and he would sit for hours with his chin upon his hands glaring and frowning, all wrapped in the one idea. This made him a bit of a butt among the men at first, and they laughed at him for it; but

when they came to know him better they found that he was not a good man to laugh at, and then they dropped it.

We were early risers at that time, and the whole brigade was usually under arms at the flush of dawn. One morning—it was the sixteenth of June—we had just formed up, and General Adams had ridden up to give some order to Colonel Reynell within a musket-length of where I stood, when suddenly they both stood staring along the Brussels road. None of us dared move our heads, but every eye in the regiment whisked round, and there we saw an officer with the cockade of a general's aide-de-camp thundering down the road as hard as a great dapple-grey horse could carry him. He bent his face over its mane and flogged at its neck with the slack of the bridle, as though he rode for very life.

"Hullo, Reynell!" says the general. "This begins to look like business. What do you make of it?"

They both cantered their horses forward, and Adams tore open the dispatch which the messenger handed to him. The wrapper had not touched the ground before he turned waving the letter over his head as if it had been a sabre.

"Dismiss!" he cried. "General parade and march in half-an-hour."

Then in an instant all was buzz and bustle, and the news on every lip. Napoleon had crossed the frontier the day before, had pushed the Prussians before him, and was already deep in the country to the east of us with a hundred and fifty thousand men. Away we scuttled to gather our things

together and have our breakfast, and in an hour we had marched off and left Ath and the Dender behind us for ever. There was good need for haste, for the Prussians had sent no news to Wellington of what was doing, and though he had rushed from Brussels at the first whisper of it, like a good old mastiff from its kennel, it was hard to see how he could come up in time to help the Prussians.

It was a bright warm morning, and as the brigade tramped down the broad Belgian road the dust rolled up from it like the smoke of a battery. I tell you that we blessed the man that planted the poplars along the sides, for their shadow was better than drink to us. Over across the fields, both to the right and the left, were other roads, one quite close, and the other a mile or more from us. A column of infantry was marching down the near one, and it was a fair race between us, for we were each walking for all we were worth. There was such a wreath of dust round them that we could only see the gun-barrels and the bear-skins breaking out here and there, with the head and shoulders of a mounted officer coming out above the cloud, and the flutter of the colours. It was a brigade of the Guards, but we could not tell which, for we had two of them with us in the campaign. On the far road there was also dust and to spare, but through it there flashed every now and then a long twinkle of brightness, like a hundred silver beads threaded in a line; and the breeze brought down such a snarling, clanging, clashing kind of music as I had never listened to. If I had been left to myself it would have been long before I knew what it was; but our corporals and

sergeants were all old soldiers, and I had one trudging along with his halbert at my elbow, who was full of precept and advice.

"That's heavy horse," said he. "You see that double twinkle? That means they have helmet as well as cuirass. It's the Royals, or the Enniskillens, or the Household. You can hear their cymbals and kettles. The French heavies are too good for us. They have ten to our one, and good men too. You've got to shoot at their faces or else at their horses. Mind you that when you see them coming, or else you'll find a four-foot sword stuck through your liver to teach you better. Hark! Hark! Hark! There's the old music again?"

And as he spoke there came the low grumbling of a cannonade away somewhere to the east of us, deep and hoarse, like the roar of some blood-daubed beast that thrives on the lives of men. At the same instant there was a shouting of "Heh! heh! heh!" from behind, and somebody roared, "Let the guns get through!" Looking back, I saw the rear companies split suddenly in two and hurl themselves down on either side into the ditch, while six cream-coloured horses, galloping two and two with their bellies to the ground, came thundering through the gap with a fine twelve-pound gun whirling and creaking behind them. Behind were another, and another, four-and-twenty in all, flying past us with such a din and clatter, the blue-coated men clinging on to the gun and the tumbrils, the drivers cursing and cracking their whips, the manes flying, the mops and buckets clanking, and the whole air filled with the heavy rumble and the jingling of chains.

There was a roar from the ditches, and a shout from the gunners, and we saw a rolling grey cloud before us, with a score of busbies breaking through the shadow. Then we closed up again, while the growling ahead of us grew louder and deeper than ever.

"There's three batteries there," said the sergeant. "There's Bull's and Webber Smith's, but the other is new. There's some more on ahead of us, for here is the track of a nine-pounder, and the others were all twelves. Choose a twelve if you want to get hit; for a nine mashes you up, but a twelve snaps you like a carrot." And then he went on to tell about the dreadful wounds that he had seen, until my blood ran like iced water in my veins, and you might have rubbed all our faces in pipeclay and we should have been no whiter. "Aye, you'll look sicklier yet, when you get a hatful of grape into your tripes," said he.

And then, as I saw some of the old soldiers laughing, I began to understand that this man was trying to frighten us; so I began to laugh also, and the others as well, but it was not a very hearty laugh either.

The sun was almost above us when we stopped at a little place called Hal, where there is an old pump from which I drew and drank a shako full of water—and never did a mug of Scotch ale taste as sweet. More guns passed us here, and Vivian's Hussars, three regiments of them, smart men with bonny brown horses, a treat to the eye. The noise of the cannons was louder than ever now, and it tingled through my nerves just as it had done years before, when, with Edie by my side, I had seen

the merchant-ship fight with the privateers. It was so loud now that it seemed to me that the battle must be going on just beyond the nearest wood, but my friend the sergeant knew better.

"It 's twelve to fifteen mile off," said he. "You may be sure the general knows we are not wanted, or we should not be resting here at Hal."

What he said proved to be true, for a minute later down came the colonel with orders that we should pile arms and bivouac where we were; and there we stayed all day, while horse and foot and guns, English, Dutch, and Hanoverians, were streaming through. The devil's music went on till evening, sometimes rising into a roar, sometimes sinking into a grumble, until about eight o'clock in the evening it stopped altogether. We were eating our hearts out, as you may think, to know what it all meant, but we knew that what the Duke did would be for the best, so we just waited in patience.

Next day the brigade remained at Hal in the morning, but about mid-day came an orderly from the Duke, and we pushed on once more until we came to a little village called Braine something, and there we stopped; and time too, for a sudden thunderstorm broke over us, and a plump of rain that turned all the roads and the fields into bog and mire. We got into the barns at this village for shelter, and there we found two stragglers—one from a kilted regiment, and the other a man of the German Legion, who had a tale to tell that was as dreary as the weather.

Boney had thrashed the Prussians the day before,

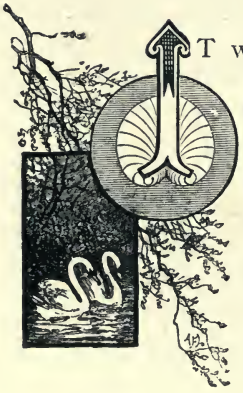
and our fellows had been sore put to it to hold their own against Ney, but had beaten him off at last. It seems an old stale story to you now, but you cannot think how we scrambled round those two men in the barn, and pushed and fought, just to catch a word of what they said, and how those who had heard were in turn mobbed by those who had not. We laughed and cheered and groaned all in turn as we heard how the 44th had received cavalry in line, how the Dutch-Belgians had fled, and how the Black Watch had taken the Lancers into their square, and then had killed them at their leisure. But the Lancers had had the laugh on their side when they crumpled up the 69th and carried off one of the colours. To wind it all up, the Duke was in retreat in order to keep in touch with the Prussians, and it was rumoured that he would take up his ground and fight a big battle just at the very place where we had been halted.

And soon we saw that this rumour was true; for the weather cleared towards evening, and we were all out on the ridge to see what we could see. It was such a bonny stretch of corn and grazing land, with the crops just half green and half yellow, and fine rye as high as a man's shoulder. A scene more full of peace you could not think of, and look where you would over the low curving corn-covered hills, you could see the little village steeples pricking up their spires among the poplars. But slashed right across this pretty picture was a long trail of marching men—some red, some green, some blue, some black—zigzagging over the plain and choking the roads, one end so close that we

could shout to them as they stacked their muskets on the ridge at our left, and the other end lost among the woods as far as we could see. And then on other roads we saw the teams of horses toiling and the dull gleam of the guns, and the men straining and swaying as they helped to turn the spokes in the deep, deep mud. As we stood there, regiment after regiment and brigade after brigade took position on the ridge, and ere the sun had set we lay in a line of over sixty thousand men, blocking Napoleon's way to Brussels. But the rain had come swishing down again, and we of the 71st rushed off to our barn once more, where we had better quarters than the greater part of our comrades, who lay stretched in the mud with the storm beating upon them until the first peep of day.

CHAPTER XII.

The Shadow on the Land.



IT was still drizzling in the morning, with brown drifting clouds and a damp chilly wind. It was a queer thing for me as I opened my eyes to think that I should be in a battle that day, though none of us ever thought it would be such a one as it proved to be. We were up and ready, however, with the first light, and as we threw open the doors of our barn we heard the most lovely music that I had ever listened to playing somewhere in the distance. We all stood in clusters hearkening to it, it was so sweet and innocent and sad-like. But our sergeant laughed when he saw how it pleased us all.

"Them are the French bands," said he; "and if you come out here you'll see what some of you may not live to see again."

Out we went, the beautiful music still sounding in our ears, and stood on a rise just outside the barn. Down below at the bottom of the slope, about half a musket-shot from us was a snug tiled farm with a hedge and a bit of an apple orchard. All round it a line of men in red coats and high fur hats were working like bees, knocking holes in the wall and barring up the doors.

"Them's the light companies of the Guards," said the sergeant. "They'll hold that farm while one of them can wag a finger. But look over yonder and you'll see the camp fires of the French."

We looked across the valley at the low ridge upon the further side, and saw a thousand little yellow points of flame with the dark smoke wreathing up in the heavy air. There was another farm-house on the further side of the valley, and as we looked we suddenly saw a little group of horsemen appear on a knoll beside it and stare across at us. There were a dozen Hussars behind, and in front five men, three with helmets, one with a long straight red feather in his hat, and the last with a low cap.

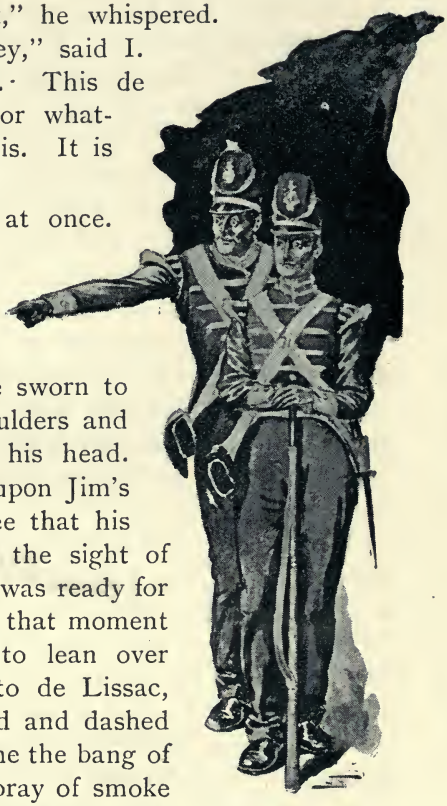
"By God!" cried the sergeant, "that's him! That's Boney, the one with the grey horse. Aye, I'll lay a month's pay on it."

I strained my eyes to see him, this man who had cast that great shadow over Europe, which darkened the nations for five-and-twenty years, and which had even fallen across our out-of-the-world little sheep-farm, and had dragged us all—myself, Edie, and Jim—out of the lives that our folk had lived before us. As far as I could see, he was a dumpy, square-shouldered kind of man, and he held his double glasses to his eyes with his elbows spread very wide out on each side. I was still staring when I heard the catch of a man's breath by my side, and there was Jim with his eyes glowing like two coals, and his face thrust over my shoulder.

"That's he, Jock," he whispered.

"Yes, that's Boney," said I.

"No, no, it's he. This de Lapp or de Lissac, or whatever his devil's name is. It is he."



Then I saw him at once. It was the horseman with the high red feather in his hat. Even at that distance I could have sworn to the slope of his shoulders and the way he carried his head. I clapped my hands upon Jim's sleeve, for I could see that his blood was boiling at the sight of the man, and that he was ready for any madness. But at that moment Buonaparte seemed to lean over and say something to de Lissac, and the party wheeled and dashed away, while there came the bang of a gun and a white spray of smoke from a battery along the ridge. At the same instant the assembly was blown in our village, and we rushed for our arms and fell in. There was a burst of firing all along the line, and we thought that the battle had begun; but it came really from our fellows cleaning their pieces, for their priming was in some danger of being wet from the damp night.

From where we stood it was a sight now that

was worth coming over the seas to see. On our own ridge was the checquer of red and blue stretching right away to a village over two miles from us. It was whispered from man to man in the ranks, however, that there was too much of the blue and too little of the red; for the Belgians had shown on the day before that their hearts were too soft for the work, and we had twenty thousand of them for comrades. Then, even our British troops were half made up of militiamen and recruits; for the pick of the old Peninsular regiments were on the ocean in transports, coming back from some fool's quarrel with our kinsfolk of America. But for all that we could see the bearskins of the Guards, two strong brigades of them, and the bonnets of the Highlanders, and the blue of the old German Legion, and the red lines of Pack's brigade, and Kempt's brigade and the green dotted riflemen in front, and we knew that come what might these were men who would bide where they were placed, and that they had a man to lead them who would place them where they should bide.

Of the French we had seen little save the twinkle of their fires, and a few horsemen here and there upon the curves of the ridge; but as we stood and waited there came suddenly a grand blare from their bands, and the whole army came flooding over the low hill which had hid them, brigade after brigade and division after division, until the broad slope in its whole length and depth was blue with their uniforms and bright with the glint of their weapons. It seemed that they would never have done, still pouring over and pouring over, while our men leaned

on their muskets and smoked their pipes looking down at this grand gathering and listening to what the old soldiers who had fought the French before had to say about them. Then when the infantry had formed in long deep masses their guns came whirling and bounding down the slope, and it was pretty to see how smartly they unlimbered and were ready for action. And then at a stately trot down came the cavalry, thirty regiments at the least, with plume and breastplate, twinkling sword and fluttering lance, forming up at the flanks and rear, in long shifting, glimmering lines.

"Them's the chaps!" cried our sergeant. "They're gluttons to fight, they are. And you see them regiments with the great high hats in the middle, a bit behind the farm? That's the Guard, twenty thousand of them, my sons, and all picked men—grey-headed devils that have done nothing but fight since they were as high as my gaiters. They've three men to our two, and two guns to our one, and, by God! they'll make you recruities wish you were back in Argyle Street before they have finished with you."

He was not a cheering man, our sergeant; but then he had been in every fight since Corunna, and had a medal with seven clasps upon his breast, so that he had a right to talk in his own fashion.

When the Frenchmen had all arranged themselves just out of cannon-shot we saw a small group of horsemen, all in a blaze with silver and scarlet and gold, ride swiftly between the divisions, and as they went a roar of cheering burst out from either side of them, and we could see arms outstretched to them

and hands waving. An instant later the noise had died away, and the two armies stood facing each other in absolute deadly silence—a sight which often comes back to me in my dreams. Then, of a sudden, there was a lurch among the men just in front of us; a thin column wheeled off from the dense blue clump, and came swinging up towards the farm-house which lay below us. It had not taken fifty paces before a gun banged out from an English battery on our left, and the Battle of Waterloo had begun.

It is not for me to try to tell you the story of that battle, and, indeed, I should have kept far enough away from such a thing had it not happened that our own fates, those of the three simple folk who came from the border country, were all just as much mixed up in it as those of any king or emperor of them all. To tell the honest truth, I have learned more about that battle from what I have read than from what I saw, for how much could I see with a comrade on either side, and a great white cloudbank at the very end of my firelock? It was from books and the talk of others that I learned how the heavy cavalry charged, how they rode over the famous cuirassiers, and how they were cut to pieces before they could get back. From them, too, I learned all about the successive assaults, and how the Belgians fled, and how Pack and Kempt stood firm. But of my own knowledge I can only speak of what we saw during that long day in the rifts of the smoke and the lulls of the firing, and it is just of that that I will tell you.

We were on the right of the line and in reserve,

for the Duke was afraid that Boney might work round on that side and get at him from behind; so our three regiments, with another British brigade and the Hanoverians, were placed there to be ready for anything. There were two brigades of light cavalry, too; but the French attack was all from the front, so it was late in the day before we were really wanted.

The English battery which fired the first gun was still banging away on our left, and a German one was hard at work upon our right, so that we were wrapped round with the smoke; but we were not so hidden as to screen us from a line of French guns opposite, for a score of round shot came piping through the air and plumped right into the heart of us. As I heard the scream of them past my ear my head went down like a diver, but our sergeant gave me a prod in the back with the handle of his halbert.

"Don't be so blasted polite," said he; "when you're hit, you can bow once and for all."

There was one of those balls that knocked five men into a bloody mash, and I saw it lying on the ground afterwards like a crimson football. Another went through the adjutant's horse with a plop like a stone in the mud, broke its back, and left it lying like a burst gooseberry. Three more fell further to the right, and by the stir and cries we could tell that they had all told.

"Ah! James, you've lost a good mount," says Major Reed, just in front of me, looking down at the adjutant, whose boots and breeches were all running with blood.

"I gave a cool fifty for him in Glasgow," said the other. "Don't you think, major, that the men had better lie down now that the guns have got our range?"

"Tut!" said the other; "they are young, James, and it will do them good."

"They'll get enough of it before the day's done," grumbled the other; but at that moment Colonel Reynell saw that the Rifles and the 52nd were down on either side of us, so we had the order to stretch ourselves out too. Precious glad we were when we could hear the shot whining like hungry dogs within a few feet of our backs. Even now a thud and a splash every minute or so, with a yelp of pain and a drumming of boots upon the ground, told us that we were still losing heavily.

A thin rain was falling and the damp air held the smoke low, so that we could only catch glimpses of what was doing just in front of us, though the roar of the guns told us that the battle was general all along the lines. Four hundred of them were all crashing at once now, and the noise was enough to split the drum of your ear. Indeed, there was not one of us but had a singing in his head for many a long day afterwards. Just opposite us on the slope of the hill was a French gun, and we could see the men serving her quite plainly. They were small active men, with very tight breeches and high hats with great straight plumes sticking up from them; but they worked like sheep-shearers, running and sponging and training. There were fourteen when I saw them first, and only four left standing at the last, but they were working away just as hard as ever.

The farm that they called Hougoumont was down in front of us, and all the morning we could see that a terrible fight was going on there, for the walls and the windows and the orchard hedges were all flame and smoke, and there rose such shrieking and crying from it as I never heard before. It was half burned down, and shattered with balls, and ten thousand men were hammering at the gates; but four hundred guardsmen held it in the morning and two hundred held it in the evening, and no French foot was ever set within its threshold. But how they fought, those Frenchmen! Their lives were no more to them than the mud under their feet. There was one—I can see him now—a stoutish ruddy man on a crutch. He hobbled up alone in a lull of the firing to the side gate of Hougoumont and he beat upon it, screaming to his men to come after him. For five minutes he stood there, strolling about in front of the gun-barrels which spared him, but at last a Brunswick skirmisher in the orchard flicked out his brains with a rifle shot. And he was only one of many, for all day when they did not come in masses they came in twos and threes with as brave a face as if the whole army were at their heels.

So we lay all morning, looking down at the fight at Hougoumont; but soon the Duke saw that there was nothing to fear upon his right, and so he began to use us in another way.

The French had pushed their skirmishers past the farm, and they lay among the young corn in front of us popping at the gunners, so that three pieces out of six on our left were lying with their men strewed in the mud all round them. But the Duke

had his eyes everywhere, and up he galloped at that moment—a thin, dark, wiry man with very bright eyes, a hooked nose, and big cockade on his cap. There were a dozen officers at his heels, all as merry as if it were a foxhunt, but of the dozen there was not one left in the evening.

"Warm work, Adams," said he as he rode up.

"Very warm, your grace," said our general.

"But we can outstay them at it, I think. Tut, tut, we cannot let skirmishers silence a battery! Just drive those fellows out of that, Adams."

Then first I knew what a devil's thrill runs through a man when he is given a bit of fighting to do. Up to now we had just lain and been killed, which is the weariest kind of work. Now it was our turn, and, my word, we were ready for it. Up we jumped, the whole brigade, in a four-deep line, and rushed at the cornfield as hard as we could tear. The skirmishers snapped at us as we came, and then away they bolted like corncrakes, their heads down, their backs rounded, and their muskets at the trail. Half of them got away; but we caught up the others, the officer first, for he was a very fat man who could not run fast. It gave me quite a turn when I saw Rob Stewart, on my right, stick his bayonet into the man's broad back and heard him howl like a damned soul. There was no quarter in that field, and it was butt or point for all of them. The men's blood was aflame, and little wonder, for these wasps had been stinging all morning without our being able so much as to see them.

And now, as we broke through the further edge of the cornfield, we got in front of the smoke, and

there was the whole French army in position before us, with only two meadows and a narrow lane between us. We set up a yell as we saw them, and away we should have gone slap at them if we had been left to ourselves; for silly young soldiers never think that harm can come to them until it is there in their midst. But the Duke had cantered his horse beside us as we advanced, and now he roared something to the general, and the officers all rode in front of our line holding out their arms for us to stop. There was a blowing of bugles, a pushing and a shoving, with the sergeants cursing and digging us with their halberts; and in less time than it takes me to write it, there was the brigade in three neat little squares, all bristling with bayonets and in echelon, as they call it, so that each could fire across the face of the other.

It was the saving of us, as even so young a soldier as I was could very easily see; and we had none too much time either. There was a low rolling hill on our right flank, and from behind this there came a sound like nothing on this earth so much as the beat of the waves on the Berwick coast when the wind blows from the east. The earth was all shaking with that dull roaring sound, and the air was full of it.

"Steady, 71st! for God's sake, steady!" shrieked the voice of our colonel behind us; but in front was nothing but the green gentle slope of the grassland, all mottled with daisies and dandelions.

And then suddenly over the curve we saw eight hundred brass helmets rise up, all in a moment, each with a long tag of horsehair flying from its crest;

and then eight hundred fierce brown faces all pushed forward, and glaring out from between the ears of as many horses. There was an instant of gleaming breastplates, waving swords, tossing manes, fierce red nostrils opening and shutting, and hoofs pawing the air before us; and then down came the line of muskets, and our bullets smacked up against their armour like the clatter of a hailstorm upon a window. I fired with the rest, and then rammed down another charge as fast as I could, staring out through the smoke in front of me, where I could see some long, thin thing which flapped slowly backwards and forwards. A bugle sounded for us to cease firing, and a whiff of wind came to clear the curtain from in front of us, and then we could see what had happened.

I had expected to see half that regiment of horse lying on the ground; but whether it was that their breastplates had shielded them, or whether, being young and a little shaken at their coming, we had fired high, our volley had done no very great harm. About thirty horses lay about, three of them together within ten yards of me, the middle one right on its back with its four legs in the air, and it was one of these I had seen flapping through the smoke. Then there were eight or ten dead men and about as many wounded, sitting dazed on the grass for the most part, though one was shouting "*Vive l'Empereur!*" at the top of his voice. Another fellow who had been shot in the thigh—a great black-moustached chap he was too—leaned his back against his dead horse and, picking up his carbine, fired as coolly as if he had been shooting for a prize, and hit Angus

Myres, who was only two from me, right through the forehead. Then he out with his hand to get another carbine that lay near, but before he could reach it big Hodgson, who was the pivot man of the Grenadier company, ran out and passed his bayonet through his throat, which was a pity, for he seemed to be a very fine man.

At first I thought that the cuirassiers had run away in the smoke; but they were not men who did that very easily. Their horses had swerved at our volley, and they had raced past our square and taken the fire of the two other ones beyond. Then they broke through a hedge, and coming on a regiment of Hanoverians who were in line, they treated them as they would have treated us if we had not been so quick, and cut them to pieces in an instant. It was dreadful to see the big Germans running and screaming while the cuirassiers stood up in their stirrups to have a better sweep for their long, heavy swords, and cut and stabbed without mercy. I do not believe that a hundred men of that regiment were left alive; and the Frenchmen came back across our front, shouting at us and waving their weapons, which were crimson down to the hilts. This they did to draw our fire, but the colonel was too old a soldier; for we could have done little harm at the distance, and they would have been among us before we could reload.

These horsemen got behind the ridge on our right again, and we knew very well that if we opened up from the squares they would be down upon us in a twinkle. On the other hand, it was hard to bide as we were; for they had passed the word to a

battery of twelve guns, which formed up a few hundred yards away from us, but out of our sight, sending their balls just over the brow and down into the midst of us, which is called a plunging fire. And one of their gunners ran up on to the top of the slope and stuck a handspike into the wet earth to give them a guide, under the very muzzles of the whole brigade, none of whom fired a shot at him, each leaving him to the other. Ensign Samson, who was the youngest subaltern in the regiment, ran out from the square and pulled down the handspike; but quick as a Jack after a minnow, a lancer came flying over the ridge, and he made such a thrust from behind that not only his point, but his pennon too came out between the second and third buttons of the lad's tunic. "Helen! Helen!" he shouted, and fell dead on his face, while the lancer, blown half to pieces with musket balls, toppled over beside him, still holding on to his weapon, so that they lay together with that dreadful bond still connecting them.

But when the battery opened there was no time for us to think of anything else. A square is a very good way of meeting a horseman, but there is no worse one of taking a cannon ball, as we soon learned when they began to cut red seams through us, until our ears were weary of the slosh and splash when hard iron met living flesh and blood. After ten minutes of it we moved our square a hundred paces to the right; but we left another square behind us, for a hundred and twenty men and seven officers showed where we had been standing. Then the guns found us out again, and we

tried to open out into line; but in an instant the horsemen—lancers they were this time—were upon us from over the brae.

I tell you we were glad to hear the thud of their hoofs, for we knew that that must stop the cannon for a minute and give us a chance of hitting back. And we hit back pretty hard too that time, for we were cold and vicious and savage, and I for one felt that I cared no more for the horsemen than if they had been so many sheep on Corriemuir. One gets past being afraid or thinking of one's own skin after a while, and you just feel that you want to make some one pay for all you have gone through. We took our change out of the lancers that time; for they had no breastplates to shield them, and we cleared seventy of them out of their saddles at a volley. Maybe, if we could have seen seventy mothers weeping for their lads, we should not have felt so pleased over it; but then, men are just brutes when they are fighting, and have as much thought as two bull pups when they've got one another by the throttle.

Then the colonel did a wise stroke; for he reckoned that this would stave off the cavalry for five minutes, so he wheeled us into line, and got us back into a deeper hollow out of reach of the guns before they could open again. This gave us time to breathe, and we wanted it too, for the regiment had been melting away like an icicle in the sun. But bad as it was for us, it was a deal worse for some of the others. The whole of the Dutch Belgians were off by this time helter-skelter, fifteen thousand of them, and there were great gaps left in our line through which the French cavalry rode as pleased

them best. Then the French guns had been too many and too good for ours, and our heavy horse had been cut to bits, so that things were none too merry with us. On the other hand, Hougoumont, a blood-soaked ruin, was still ours, and every British regiment was firm; though, to tell the honest truth, as a man is bound to do, there were a sprinkling of red coats among the blue ones who made for the rear. But these were lads and stragglers, the faint hearts that are found everywhere, and I say again that no regiment flinched. It was little we could see of the battle; but a man would be blind not to know that all the fields behind us were covered with flying men. But then, though we on the right wing knew nothing of it, the Prussians had begun to show, and Napoleon had set twenty thousand of his men to face them, which made up for ours that had bolted, and left us much as we began. That was all dark to us, however; and there was a time when the French horsemen had flooded in between us and the rest of the army that we thought we were the only brigade left standing, and had set our teeth with the intention of selling our lives as dearly as we could.

At that time it was between four and five in the afternoon, and we had had nothing to eat, the most of us, since the night before, and were soaked with rain into the bargain. It had drizzled off and on all day, but for the last few hours we had not had a thought to spare either upon the weather or our hunger. Now we began to look round and tighten our waistbelts, and ask who was hit and who was spared. I was glad to see Jim, with his face all blackened with powder, standing on my right rear,

leaning on his firelock. He saw me looking at him, and shouted out to know if I were hurt.

"All right, Jim," I answered.

"I fear I'm here on a wild-goose chase," said he gloomily, "but it's not over yet. By God, I'll have him, or he'll have me!"

He had brooded so much on his wrong, had poor Jim, that I really believe that it had turned his head; for he had a glare in his eyes as he spoke that was hardly human. He was always a man that took even a little thing to heart, and since Edie had left him I am sure that he was no longer his own master.

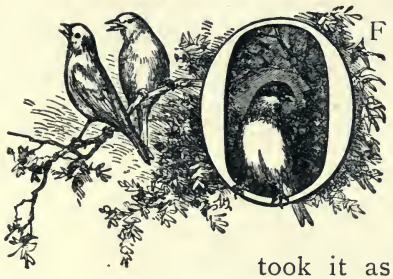
It was at this time of the fight that we saw two single fights, which they tell me were common enough in the battles of old, before men were trained in masses. As we lay in the hollow two horsemen came spurring along the ridge right in front of us, riding as hard as hoof could rattle. The first was an English dragoon, his face right down on his horse's mane, with a French cuirassier, an old, grey-headed fellow, thundering behind him, on a big black mare. Our chaps set up a hooting as they came flying on, for it seemed shame to see an Englishman run like that; but as they swept across our front we saw where the trouble lay. The dragoon had dropped his sword, and was unarmed, while the other was pressing him so close that he could not get a weapon. At last, stung maybe by our hooting, he made up his mind to chance it. His eye fell on a lance beside a dead Frenchman, so he swerved his horse to let the other pass, and hopping off cleverly enough, he gripped hold of it. But the other was too tricky for him, and was on him like a shot. The

dragoon thrust up with the lance, but the other turned it, and sliced him through the shoulder-blade. It was all done in an instant, and the Frenchman cantered his horse up the brae, showing his teeth at us over his shoulder like a snarling dog.

That was one to them, but we scored one for us presently. They had pushed forward a skirmish line, whose fire was towards the batteries on our right and left rather than on us; but we sent out two companies of the 95th to keep them in check. It was strange to hear the crackling kind of noise that they made, for both sides were using the rifle. An officer stood among the French skirmishers—a tall, lean man with a mantle over his shoulders—and as our fellows came forward he ran out midway between the two parties and stood as a fencer would, with his sword up and his head back. I can see him now, with his lowered eyelids and the kind of sneer that he had upon his face. On this the subaltern of the Rifles, who was a fine well-grown lad, ran forward and drove full tilt at him with one of the queer crooked swords that the Riflemen carry. They came together like two rams—for each ran for the other—and down they tumbled at the shock, but the Frenchman was below. Our man broke his sword short off, and took the other's blade through his left arm; but he was the stronger man, and he managed to let the life out of his enemy with the jagged stump of his blade. I thought that the French skirmishers would have shot him down, but not a trigger was drawn, and he got back to his company with one sword through his arm and half of another in his hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

The End of the Storm.



OF all the things that seem strange in that battle, now that I look back upon it, there is nothing that was queerer than the way in which it acted on my comrades; for some took it as though it had been their daily meat without question or change, and others pattered out prayers from the first gunfire to the last, and others again cursed and swore in a way that was creepy to listen to. There was one, my own left-hand man, Mike Treadingham, who kept telling about his maiden aunt, Sarah, and how she had left the money which had been promised to him to a home for the children of drowned sailors. Again and again he told me this story, and yet when the battle was over he took his oath that he had never opened his lips all day. As to me, I cannot say whether I spoke or not, but I know that my mind and my memory were clearer than I can ever remember them, and I was thinking all the time about the old folk at home, and about Cousin Edie with her saucy, dancing eyes, and de Lissac with his cat's whiskers, and all the doings at West Inch, which had ended by bringing us here on the plains of Belgium as a cockshot for two hundred and fifty cannons.

During all this time the roaring of those guns had been something dreadful to listen to, but now they suddenly died away, though it was like the lull in a thunderstorm when one feels that a worse crash is coming hard at the fringe of it. There was still a mighty noise on the distant wing, where the Prussians were pushing their way onwards, but that was two miles away. The other batteries, both French and English, were silent, and the smoke cleared so that the armies could see a little of each other. It was a dreary sight along our ridge, for there seemed to be just a few scattered knots of red and the lines of green where the German Legion stood, while the masses of the French appeared to be as thick as ever, though of course we knew that they must have lost many thousands in these attacks. We heard a great cheering and shouting from among them, and then suddenly all their batteries opened together with a roar which made the din of the earlier part seem nothing in comparison. It might well be twice as loud, for every battery was twice as near, being moved right up to point-blank range, with huge masses of horse between and behind them to guard them from attack.

When that devil's roar burst upon our ears there was not a man, down to the drummer boys, who did not understand what it meant. It was Napoleon's last great effort to crush us. There were but two more hours of light, and if we could hold our own for those all would be well. Starved and weary and spent, we prayed that we might have strength to load and stab and fire while one of us stood upon his feet.

His cannon could do us no great hurt now, for

we were on our faces, and in an instant we could turn into a huddle of bayonets if his horse came down again. But behind the thunder of the guns there rose a sharper, shriller noise, whirring and rattling, the wildest, jauntiest, most stirring kind of sound.

"It's the *pas-de-charge!*" cried an officer. "They mean business this time!"

And as he spoke we saw a strange thing. A Frenchman, dressed as an officer of hussars, came galloping towards us on a little bay horse. He was screeching "*Vive le roi! Vive le roi!*" at the pitch of his lungs, which was as much as to say that he was a deserter, since we were for the king and they for the emperor. As he passed us he roared out in English, "The Guard is coming! The Guard is coming!" and so vanished away to the rear like a leaf blown before a storm. At the same instant up there rode an aide-de-camp, with the reddest face that ever I saw upon mortal man.

"You must stop 'em, or we are done!" he cried to General Adams, so that all our company could hear him.

"How is it going?" asked the general.

"Two weak squadrons left out of six regiments of heavies," said he, and began to laugh like a man whose nerves are overstrung.

"Perhaps you would care to join in our advance? Pray consider yourself quite one of us," said the general, bowing and smiling as if he were asking him to a dish of tea.

"I shall have much pleasure," said the other, taking off his hat; and a moment afterwards our three regiments closed up, and the brigade advanced in four lines over the hollow where we had lain in

square, and out beyond to the point whence we had seen the French army.

There was little of it to be seen now, only the red belching of the guns flashing quickly out of the cloudbank, and the black figures—stooping, straining, mopping, sponging—working like devils, and at devilish work. But through the cloud that rattle and whirr rose ever louder and louder, with a deep-mouthed shouting and the stamping of thousands of feet. Then there came a broad black blurr through the haze, which darkened and hardened until we could see that it was a hundred men abreast, marching swiftly towards us, with high fur hats upon their heads and a gleam of brasswork over their brows. And behind that hundred came another hundred, and behind that another, and on and on, coiling and writhing out of the cannon-smoke like a monstrous snake, until there seemed to be no end to the mighty column. In front ran a spray of skirmishers, and behind them the drummers, and up they all came together at a kind of tripping step, with the officers clustering thickly at the sides and waving their swords and cheering. There were a dozen mounted men too at their front, all shouting together, and one with his hat held aloft upon his swordpoint. I say again, that no men upon this earth could have fought more manfully than the French did upon that day.

It was wonderful to see them; for as they came onwards they got ahead of their own guns, so that they had no longer any help from them, while they got in front of the two batteries which had been on either side of us all day. Every gun had their range to a foot, and we saw long red lines scored

right down the dark column as it advanced. So near were they, and so closely did they march, that every shot ploughed through ten files of them, and yet they closed up and came on with a swing and dash that was fine to see. Their head was turned straight for ourselves, while the 95th overlapped them on one side and the 52nd on the other.

I shall always think that if we had waited so the Guard would have broken us, for how could a four-deep line stand against such a column? But at that moment Colburne, the colonel of the 52nd, swung his right flank round so as to bring it on the side of the column, which brought the Frenchmen to a halt. Their front line was forty paces from us at the moment, and we had a good look at them. It was funny to me to remember that I had always thought of Frenchmen as small men; for there was not one of that first company who could not have picked me up as if I had been a child, and their great hats made them look taller yet. They were hard, wizened, wiry fellows too, with fierce, puckered eyes and bristling moustaches, old soldiers who had fought and fought, week in, week out, for many a year. And then, as I stood with my finger upon the trigger, waiting for the word to fire, my eye fell full upon the mounted officer with his hat upon his sword, and I saw that it was de Lissac.

I saw it, and Jim did too. I heard a shout, and saw him rush forward madly at the French column; and as quick as thought, the whole brigade took their cue from him, officers and all, and flung themselves upon the Guard in front, while our comrades charged them on the flanks. We had



"They closed up and came on with a swing and dash that was fine to see."

been waiting for the order, and they all thought now that it had been given; but you may take my word for it, that Jim Horscroft was the real leader of the brigade when we charged the Old Guard.

God knows what happened during that mad five minutes. I remember putting my musket against a blue coat and pulling the trigger, and that the man could not fall because he was so wedged in the crowd; but I saw a horrid blotch upon the cloth, and a thin curl of smoke from it as if it had taken fire. Then I found myself thrown up against two big Frenchmen, and so squeezed together, the three of us, that we could not raise a weapon. One of them, a fellow with a very large nose, got his hand up to my throat, and I felt that I was a chicken in his grasp. "*Rendez-vous, coquin; rendez-vous!*" said he, and then suddenly doubled up with a scream, for someone had stabbed him in the bowels with a bayonet. There was very little firing after the first sputter; but there was the crash of butt against barrel, the short cries of stricken men, and the roaring of the officers. And then, suddenly, they began to give ground—slowly, sullenly, step by step, but still to give ground. Ah! it was worth all that we had gone through, the thrill of that moment, when we felt that they were going to break. There was one Frenchman before me, a sharp-faced, dark-eyed man, who was loading and firing as quietly as if he were at practice, dwelling upon his aim, and looking round first to try and pick off an officer. I remember that it struck me that to kill so cool a man as that would be a good service, and I rushed at him and drove my bayonet into him. He turned as I

struck him and fired full into my face, and the bullet left a weal across my cheek which will mark me to my dying day. I tripped over him as he fell, and two others tumbling over me I was half smothered in the heap. When at last I struggled out, and cleared my eyes, which were half full of powder, I saw that the column had fairly broken, and was shredding into groups of men, who were either running for their lives or were fighting back to back in a vain attempt to check the brigade, which was still sweeping onwards. My face felt as if a red-hot iron had been laid across it; but I had the use of my limbs, so jumping over the litter of dead and mangled men, I scampered after my regiment, and fell in upon the right flank.

Old Major Elliott was there, limping along, for his horse had been shot, but none the worse in himself. He saw me come up, and nodded, but it was too busy a time for words. The brigade was still advancing, but the general rode in front of me with his chin upon his shoulder, looking back at the British position.

"There is no general advance," said he; "but I'm not going back."

"The Duke of Wellington has won a great victory," cried the aide-de-camp, in a solemn voice: and then, his feelings getting the better of him, he added, "if the damned fool would only push on!"—which set us all laughing in the flank company.

But now anyone could see that the French army was breaking up. The columns and squadrons which had stood so squarely all day were now all ragged at the edges: and where there had been thick fringes of skirmishers in front, there were now a spray of stragglers in the rear. The Guard

thinned out in front of us as we pushed on, and we found twelve guns looking us in the face, but we were over them in a moment; and I saw our youngest subaltern, next to him who had been killed by the lancer, scribbling great 71's with a lump of chalk upon them, like the schoolboy that he was. It was at that moment that we heard a roar of cheering behind us, and saw the whole British army flood over the crest of the ridge, and come pouring down upon the remains of their enemies. The guns, too, came bounding and rattling forward, and our light cavalry—as much as was left of it—kept pace with our brigade upon the right. There was no battle after that. The advance went on without a check, until our army stood lined upon the very ground which the French had held in the morning. Their guns were ours, their foot were a rabble spread over the face of the country, and their gallant cavalry alone was able to preserve some sort of order and to draw off unbroken from the field. Then at last, just as the night began to gather, our weary and starving men were able to let the Prussians take the job over, and to pile their arms upon the ground that they had won. That was as much as I saw or can tell you about the Battle of Waterloo, except that I ate a two-pound rye loaf for my supper that night, with as much salt meat as they would let me have, and a good pitcher of red wine, until I had to bore a new hole at the end of my belt, and then it fitted me as tight as a hoop to a barrel. After that I lay down in the straw where the rest of the company were sprawling, and in less than a minute I was in a dead sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Tally of Death.



DAY was breaking, and the first grey light had just begun to steal through the long thin slits in the walls of our barn, when someone shook me hard by the shoulder, and up I jumped. I had the thought in my stupid, sleepy brain that the cuirassiers were upon us, and I gripped hold of a halbert that was leaning against the wall; but then, as I saw the long lines of sleepers, I remembered where I was. But I can tell you that I stared when I saw that it was none other than Major Elliott that had roused me up. His face was very grave, and behind him stood two sergeants, with long slips of paper and pencils in their hands.

"Wake up, laddie," said the major, quite in his old easy fashion, as if we were back on Corriemuir again.

"Yes, major?" I stammered.

"I want you to come with me. I feel that I owe something to you two lads, for it was I that took you from your homes. Jim Horscroft is missing."

I gave a start at that, for what with the rush and the hunger and the weariness, I had never given a

thought to my friend since the time that he had rushed at the French Guards with the whole regiment at his heels.

"I am going out now to take a tally of our losses," said the major; "and if you cared to come with me, I should be very glad to have you."

So off we set, the major, the two sergeants, and I; and oh! but it was a dreadful, dreadful sight!—so much so that even now, after so many years, I had rather say as little of it as possible. It was bad to see in the heat of fight; but now in the cold morning, with no cheer or drum-tap or bugle blare, all the glory had gone out of it, and it was just one huge butcher's shop, where poor devils had been ripped and burst and smashed, as though we had tried to make a mock of God's image. There on the ground one could read every stage of yesterday's fight—the dead footmen that lay in squares and the fringe of dead horsemen that had charged them, and above on the slope the dead gunners, who lay round their broken piece. The Guards' column had left a streak right up the field like the trail of a snail, and at the head of it the blue coats were lying heaped upon the red ones where that fierce tug had been before they took their backward step.

And the very first thing that I saw when I got there was Jim himself. He was lying on the broad of his back, his face turned up towards the sky, and all the passion and the trouble seemed to have passed clean away from him, so that he looked just like the old Jim as I had seen him in his cot a hundred times when we were schoolmates together. I had given a cry of grief at the sight of him; but when I came

to look upon his face, and to see how much happier he looked in death than I could ever have hoped to see him in life, it was hard to mourn for him. Two French bayonets had passed through his chest, and he had died in an instant, and without pain, if one could believe the smile upon his lips.

The major and I were raising his head in the hope that some flutter of life might remain, when I heard a well-remembered voice at my side, and there was de Lissac leaning upon his elbow among a litter of dead guardsmen. He had a great blue coat muffled round him, and the hat with the high red plume was lying on the ground beside him. He was very pale, and had dark blotches under his eyes, but otherwise he was as he had ever been, with the keen, hungry nose, the wiry moustache, and the close-cropped head thinning away to baldness upon the top. His eyelids had always drooped, but now one could hardly see the glint of his eyes from beneath them.

"Hola, Jock!" he cried. "I didn't thought to have seen you here, and yet I might have known it, too, when I saw friend Jim."

"It is you that has brought all this trouble," said I.

"Ta, ta, ta!" he cried, in his old impatient fashion. "It is all arranged for us. When I was in Spain I learned to believe in Fate. It is Fate which has sent you here this morning."

"This man's blood lies at your door," said I, with my hand on poor Jim's shoulder.

"And mind on his, so we have paid our debts."

He flung open his mantle as he spoke, and I saw

with horror that a great black lump of clotted blood was hanging out of his side.

"This is my thirteenth and last," said he, with a smile. "They say that thirteen is an unlucky number. Could you spare me a drink from your flask?"

The major had some brandy and water. De Lissac supped it up eagerly. His eyes brightened, and a little fleck of colour came back in each of his haggard cheeks.

"It was Jim did this," said he. "I heard someone calling my name, and there he was with his gun against my tunic. Two of my men cut him down just as he fired. Well, well, Edie was worth it all! You will be in Paris in less than a month, Jock, and you will see her. You will find her at No. 11 of the Rue Miromesnil, which is near to the Madelaine. Break it very gently to her, Jock, for you cannot think how she loved me. Tell her that all I have are in the two black trunks, and that Antoine has the keys. You will not forget?"

"I will remember."

"And madame, your mother? I trust that you have left her very well. And monsieur, too, your father? Bear them my distinguished regards!"

Even now as death closed in upon him he gave the old bow and wave as he sent his greetings to my mother.

"Surely," said I, "your wound may not be so serious as you think. I could bring the surgeon of our regiment to you."

"My dear Jock, I have not been giving and taking wounds this fifteen years without knowing when one has come home. But it is as well, for I know that

all is ended for my little man, and I had rather go with my Voltigeurs than remain to be an exile and a beggar. Besides, it is quite certain that the Allies would have shot me, so I have saved myself from that humiliation.

"The Allies, sir," said the major, with some heat, "would be guilty of no such barbarous action."

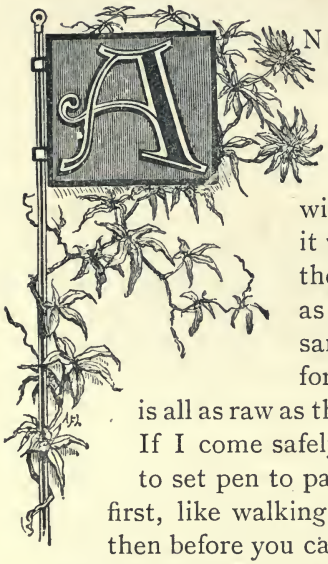
But de Lissac shook his head, with the same sad smile.

"You do not know, major," said he. "Do you suppose that I should have fled to Scotland and changed my name if I had not more to fear than my comrades who remained in Paris? I was anxious to live, for I was sure that my little man would come back. Now I had rather die, for he will never lead an army again. But I have done things that could not be forgiven. It was I that led the party which took and shot the Duke d'Enghien. It was I—— Ah, *mon Dieu!* Edie, Edie, *ma chèrie!*"

He threw out both his hands, with all the fingers feeling and quivering in the air. Then he let them drop heavily in front of him, and his chin fell forward upon his chest. One of our sergeants laid him gently down, and the other stretched the big blue mantle over him; and so we left those two whom Fate had so strangely brought together, the Scotchman and the Frenchman, lying silently and peacefully within hand's touch of each other, upon the blood-soaked hillside near Hougoumont.

CHAPTER XV.

The End of It.



AND now I have very nearly come to the end of it all, and precious glad I shall be to find myself there; for I began this old memory with a light heart, thinking that it would give me some work for the long summer evenings, but as I went on I wakened a thousand sleeping sorrows and half-forgotten griefs, and now my soul is all as raw as the hide of an ill-sheared sheep. If I come safely out of it I will swear never to set pen to paper again, for it is so easy at first, like walking into a shelving stream, and then before you can look round you are off your feet and down in a hole, and can struggle out as best you may.

We buried Jim and de Lissac with four hundred and thirty-one others of the French Guards and our own Light Infantry in a single trench. Ah! if you could sow a brave man as you sow a seed, there should be a fine crop of heroes coming up there some day! Then we left that bloody battle-field behind us for ever, and with our brigade we marched on over the French border on our way to Paris.

I had always been brought up during all these

years to look upon the French as very evil folk, and as we only heard of them in connection with fightings and slaughterings, by land and by sea, it was natural enough to think that they were vicious by nature and ill to meet with. But then, after all, they had only heard of us in the same fashion, and so, no doubt, they had just the same idea of us. But when we came to go through their country, and to see their bonny little steadings, and the douce quiet folk at work in the fields, and the women knitting by the roadside, and the old granny with a big white mutch smacking the baby to teach it manners, it was all so home-like that I could not think why it was that we had been hating and fearing these good people for so long. But I suppose that in truth it was really the man who was over them that we hated, and now that he was gone and his great shadow cleared from the land, all was brightness once more.

We jogged along happily enough through the loveliest country that ever I set my eyes on, until we came to the great city, where we thought that maybe there would be a battle, for there are so many folk in it that if only one in twenty comes out it would make a fine army. But by that time they had seen that it was a pity to spoil the whole country just for the sake of one man, and so they had told him that he must shift for himself in the future. The next we heard was that he had surrendered to the British, and that the gates of Paris were open to us, which was very good news to me, for I could get along very well just on the one battle that I had had.

But there were plenty of folk in Paris now who loved Boney; and that was natural when you think of the glory that he had brought them, and how he had never asked his army to go where he would not go himself. They had stern enough faces for us, I can tell you, when we marched in, and we of Adams' brigade were the very first who set foot in the city. We passed over a bridge which they call Neuilly, which is easier to write than to say, and through a fine park—the Bois de Boulogne, and so into the Champs d'Elysées. There we bivouacked, and pretty soon the streets were so full of Prussians and English that it became more like a camp than a city.

The very first time that I could get away I went with Rob Stewart, of my company—for we were only allowed to go about in couples—to the Rue Miromesnil. Rob waited in the hall, and I was shown upstairs; and as I put my foot over the mat, there was Cousin Edie, just the same as ever, staring at me with those wild eyes of hers. For a moment she did not recognise me, but when she did she just took three steps forward and sprang at me, with her two arms round my neck.

"Oh, my dear old Jock," she cried, "how fine you look in a red coat!"

"Yes, I am a soldier now, Edie," said I, very stiffly; for as I looked at her pretty face, I seemed to see behind it that other face which had looked up to the morning sky on the Belgium battle-field.

"Fancy that!" she cried. "What are you then, Jock? A general? A captain?"

"No, I am a private."

"What! Not one of the common people who carry guns?"

"Yes, I carry a gun."

"Oh, that is not nearly so interesting," said she. And she went back to the sofa from which she had risen. It was a wonderful room, all silk and velvet and shiny things, and I felt inclined to go back to give my boots another rub. As Edie sat down again, I saw that she was all in black, and so I knew that she had heard of de Lissac's death.

"I am glad to see that you know all," said I, "for I am a clumsy hand at breaking things. He said that you were to keep whatever was in the boxes, and that Antoine had the keys."

"Thank you, Jock, thank you," said she. "It was like your kindness to bring the message. I heard of it nearly a week ago. I was mad for the time—quite mad. I shall wear mourning all my days, although you can see what a fright it makes me look. Ah! I shall never get over it. I shall take the veil and die in a convent."

"If you please, madame," said a maid, looking in, "the Count de Beton wishes to see you."

"My dear Jock," said Edie, jumping up, "this is very important. I am sorry to cut our chat short, but I am sure that you will come to see me again, will you not, when I am less desolate? And would you mind going out by the side door instead of the main one? Thank you, you dear old Jock; you were always such a good boy, and did exactly what you were told."

And that was the last that I was ever to see of Cousin Edie. She stood in the sunlight with



the old challenge in her eyes, and flash of her teeth; and so I shall always remember her, shining and unstable, like a drop of quicksilver. As I joined my comrade in the street below, I saw a grand carriage and pair at the door, and I knew that she had asked me to slip out so that her grand new friends might never know what common people she had been associated with in her childhood. She had never asked for Jim, nor for my father and mother who had been so kind to her. Well, it was just her way, and she could no more help it than a rabbit can help wagging its scut, and yet it made me heavy-hearted to think of it. Two months later I heard that she had married this same Count de Beton, and she died in child-bed a year or two later.

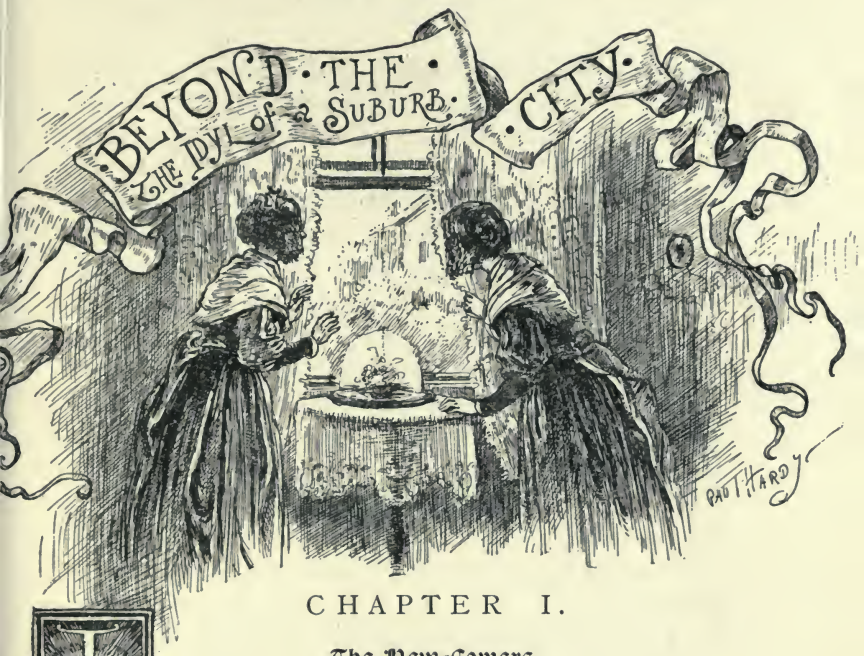
And as for us, our work was done, for the great shadow had been cleared away from Europe, and should no longer be thrown across the breadth of the lands, over peaceful farms and little villages, darkening the lives which should have been so happy. I came back to Corriemuir after I had bought my discharge, and there, when my father died, I took over the sheep-farm, and married Lucy Deane, of Berwick, and have brought up seven children, who are all taller than their father, and take mighty good care that he shall not forget it. But in the quiet, peaceful days that pass now, each as like the other as so many Scotch tups, I can hardly get the young folks to believe that even here we have had our romance, when Jim and I went a-wooing, and the man with the cat's whiskers came up from the sea.

END OF "THE GREAT SHADOW."

Beyond the City.

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CHAPTER I.

The New-Comers.

"IF you please, mum," said the voice of a domestic from somewhere round the angle of the door, "number three is moving in."

Two little old ladies, who were sitting at either side of a table, sprang to their feet with ejaculations of interest, and rushed to the window of the sitting-room.

"Take care, Monica dear," said one, shrouding herself in the lace curtains; "don't let them see us."

"No, no, Bertha; we must not give them reason to say that their neighbours are inquisitive. But I think that we are safe if we stand like this."

The open window looked out upon a sloping lawn,

well trimmed and pleasant, with fuzzy rose bushes and a star-shaped bed of Sweet-William. It was bounded by a low wooden fence, which screened it off from a broad modern new metalled road. At the other side of this road were three large detached deep-bodied villas with peaky eaves and small wooden balconies, each standing in its own little square of grass and of flowers. All three were equally new, but numbers one and two were curtained and sedate with a human sociable look to them; while number three, with yawning door and unkempt garden, had apparently only just received its furniture and made itself ready for its occupants. A four-wheeler had driven up to the gate, and it was at this that the old ladies, peeping out bird-like from behind their curtains, directed an eager and questioning gaze.

The cabman had descended, and the passengers within were handing out the articles which they desired him to carry up to the house. He stood red-faced and blinking, with his crooked arms outstretched, while a male hand, protruding from the window, kept piling up upon him a series of articles the sight of which filled the curious old ladies with bewilderment.

"My goodness me!" cried Monica, the smaller, the drier, and the more wizened of the pair. "What do you call that, Bertha? It looks to me like four batter puddings."

"Those are what young men box each other with," said Bertha, with a conscious air of superior worldly knowledge.

"And those?"

Two great bottle-shaped pieces of yellow shining wood had been heaped upon the cabman.

"Oh! I don't know what those are," confessed Bertha.

Indian clubs had never before obtruded themselves upon her peaceful and very feminine existence.

These mysterious articles were followed, however, by others which were more within their range of comprehension—by a pair of dumb-bells, a purple cricket-bag, a set of golf clubs, and a tennis racket. Finally, when the cabman, all top-heavy and bristling, had staggered off up the garden path, there emerged in a very leisurely way from the cab a big, powerfully-built young man with a bull pup under one arm and a pink sporting paper in his hand. The paper he crammed into the pocket of his light yellow dust-coat, and extended his hand as if to assist some one else from the vehicle. To the surprise of the two old ladies, however, the only thing which his open palm received was a violent slap, and a tall lady bounded unassisted out of the cab. With a regal wave she motioned the young man towards the door, and then, with one hand upon her hip, she stood in a careless, lounging attitude by the gate, kicking her toe against the wall and listlessly awaiting the return of the driver.

As she turned slowly round, and the sunshine struck upon her face, the two watchers were amazed to see that this very active and energetic lady was far from being in her first youth, so far that she had certainly come of age again since she first passed that landmark in life's journey. Her finely-chiselled, clean-cut face, with something red Indian

about the firm mouth and strongly-marked cheek bones, showed, even at that distance, traces of the friction of the passing years. And yet she was very handsome. Her features were as firm in repose as those of a Greek bust, and her great dark eyes were arched over by two brows so black, so thick, and so delicately curved, that the eye turned away from the harsher details of the face to marvel at their grace and strength. Her figure, too, was straight as a dart, a little portly, perhaps, but curving into magnificent outlines, which were half concealed and half accentuated by the strange costume which she wore. Her hair, black but plentifully shot with grey, was brushed plainly back from her high forehead, and was gathered under a small round felt hat, like that of a man, with one sprig of feather in the band as a concession to her sex. A double-breasted jacket of some dark frieze-like material fitted closely to her figure, while her straight blue skirt, untrimmed and ungathered, was cut so short that the lower curve of her finely-turned legs was plainly visible beneath it, terminating in a pair of broad, flat, low-heeled and square-toed shoes. Such was the lady who lounged at the gate of number three under the curious eyes of her two opposite neighbours.

But if her conduct and appearance had already somewhat jarred upon their limited and precise sense of the fitness of things, what were they to think of the next little act in this *tableau vivant*? The cabman, red and heavy-jowled, had come back from his labours, and held out his hand for his fare. The lady passed him a coin, there was a moment of mumbling and gesticulating, and suddenly she had

him with both hands by the red cravat which girt his neck, and was shaking him as a terrier would a rat. Right across the pavement she thrust him, and, pushing him up against the wheel, she banged his head three several times against the side of his own vehicle.

"Can I be of any use to you, aunt?" asked the large youth, framing himself in the open doorway.

"Not the slightest," panted the enraged lady. "There, you low blackguard, that will teach you to be impertinent to a lady."

The cabman looked helplessly about him with a bewildered, questioning gaze, as one to whom alone of all men this unheard-of and extraordinary thing had happened. Then, rubbing his head, he mounted slowly on to the box, and drove away with an up-tossed hand appealing to the universe. The lady smoothed down her dress, pushed back her hair under her little felt hat, and strode in through the hall-door, which was closed behind her. As with a whisk her short skirts vanished into the darkness, the two spectators—Miss Bertha and Miss Monica Williams—sat looking at each other in speechless amazement. For fifty years they had peeped through that little window and across that trim garden, but never yet had such a sight as this come to confound them.

"I wish," said Monica at last, "that we had kept the field."

"I am sure I wish we had," answered her sister.

CHAPTER II.

Breaking the Ice.

THE cottage from the window of which the Misses Williams had looked out stands, and has stood for many a year, in that pleasant suburban district which lies between Norwood, Anerley, and Forest Hill. Long before there had been a thought of a township there, when the Metropolis was still quite a distant thing, old Mr. Williams had inhabited "The Brambles," as the little house was called, and had owned all the fields about it. Six or eight such cottages scattered over a rolling country-side were all the houses to be found there in the days when the century was young. From afar, when the breeze came from the north, the dull, low roar of the great City might be heard like the breaking of the tide of life, while along the horizon might be seen the dim curtain of smoke, the grim spray which that tide threw up. Gradually, however, as the years passed, the City had thrown out a long brick-feeler here and there, curving, extending, and coalescing, until at last the little cottages had been gripped round by these red tentacles, and had been absorbed to make room for the modern villa. Field by field the estate of old Mr. Williams had been sold to the speculative

builder, and had borne rich crops of snug suburban dwellings, arranged in curving crescents and tree-lined avenues. The father had passed away before his cottage was entirely bricked round, but his two daughters, to whom the property had descended, lived to see the last vestige of country taken from them. For years they had clung to the one field which faced their windows, and it was only after much argument and many heartburnings that they had at last consented that it should share the fate of the others. A broad road was driven through their quiet domain, the quarter was re-named "The Wilderness," and three square, staring, uncompromising villas began to sprout up on the other side. With sore hearts, the two shy little old maids watched their steady progress, and speculated as to what fashion of neighbours chance would bring into the little nook which had always been their own.

And at last they were all three finished. Wooden balconies and overhanging eaves had been added to them, so that, in the language of the advertisement, there were vacant "three eligible Swiss-built villas, with sixteen rooms, no basement, electric bells, hot and cold water, and every modern convenience, including a common tennis-lawn, to be let at £100 a year, or £1,500 purchase." So tempting an offer did not long remain open. Within a few weeks the card had vanished from number one, and it was known that Admiral Hay Denver, V.C., C.B., with Mrs. Hay Denver and their only son, were about to move into it. The news brought peace to the hearts of the Williams sisters. They had lived with a settled conviction that some wild impossible colony, some

shouting, singing family of madcaps, would break in upon their peace. This establishment, at least, was irreproachable. A reference to *Men of the Time* showed them that Admiral Hay Denver was a most distinguished officer, who had begun his active career at Bomarsund and had ended it at Alexandria, having managed between these two episodes to see as much service as any man of his years. From the Taku Forts and the *Shannon* brigade to dhow-harrying off Zanzibar there was no variety of naval work which did not appear in his record; while the Victoria Cross and the Albert Medal for saving life vouched for it that in peace as in war his courage was still of the same true temper. Clearly a very eligible neighbour this, the more so as they had been confidently assured by the estate agent that Mr. Harold Denver, the son, was a most quiet young gentleman, and that he was busy from morning to night on the Stock Exchange.

The Hay Denvers had hardly moved in before number two also struck its placard, and again the ladies found that they had no reason to be discontented with their neighbours. Doctor Balthazar Walker was a very well-known name in the medical world. Did not his qualifications, his memberships, and the record of his writings fill a long half-column in the *Medical Directory*, from his first little paper on the "Gouty Diathesis" in 1859 to his exhaustive treatise upon "Affections of the Vaso-Motor System" in 1884? A successful medical career, which promised to end in a presidentship of a college and a baronetcy, had been cut short by his sudden inheritance of a considerable sum from a grateful patient,

which had rendered him independent for life, and had enabled him to turn his attention to the more scientific part of his profession, which had always had a greater charm for him than its more practical and commercial aspect. To this end he had given up his house in Weymouth Street, and had taken this opportunity of moving himself, his scientific instruments, and his two charming daughters (he had been a widower for some years) into the more peaceful atmosphere of Norwood.

There was thus but one villa unoccupied, and it was no wonder that the two maiden ladies watched with a keen interest, which deepened into a dire apprehension, the curious incidents which heralded the coming of the new tenants. They had already learned from the agent that the family consisted of two only—Mrs. Westmacott, a widow, and her nephew, Charles Westmacott. How simple and how select it had sounded! Who could have foreseen from it these fearful portents which seemed to threaten violence and discord among the dwellers in "The Wilderness"? Again the two old maids cried in heartfelt chorus that they wished they had not sold their field.

"Well, at least, Monica," remarked Bertha, as they sat over their teacups that afternoon, "however strange these people may be, it is our duty to be as polite to them as to the others."

"Most certainly," acquiesced her sister.

"Since we have called upon Mrs. Hay Denver and upon the Miss Walkers, we must call upon this Mrs. Westmacott also."

"Certainly, dear. As long as they are living

upon our land I feel as if they were, in a sense, our guests, and that it is our duty to welcome them."

"Then we shall call to-morrow," said Bertha, with decision.

"Yes, dear, we shall. But, oh, I wish it was over!"

At four o'clock on the next day the two maiden ladies set off upon their hospitable errand. In their stiff crackling dresses of black silk, with jet-bespangled jackets, and little rows of cylindrical grey curls drooping down on either side of their black bonnets, they looked like two old fashion plates which had wandered off into the wrong decade. Half curious and half fearful, they knocked at the door of number three, which was instantly opened by a red-headed page-boy.

Yes, Mrs. Westmacott was at home. He ushered them into the front room, furnished as a drawing-room, where, in spite of the fine spring weather, a large fire was burning in the grate. The boy took their cards, and then, as they sat down together upon a settee, he set their nerves in a thrill by darting behind a curtain with a shrill cry, and prodding at something with his foot. The bull pup which they had seen upon the day before bolted from its hiding-place, and scuttled snarling from the room.

"It wants to get at Eliza," said the youth, in a confidential whisper. "Master says she would give him more'n he brought."

He smiled affably at the two little stiff black figures, and departed in search of his mistress.

"What—what did he say?" gasped Bertha.

"Something about a —— Oh, goodness gracious!

Oh, Bertha! Oh, merciful heavens! Oh, help, help, help, help, help!"

The two sisters had bounded on to the settee, and stood there with staring eyes and skirts gathered in while they filled the whole house with their yells. Out of a high wicker-work basket which stood by the fire there had risen a flat diamond-shaped head with wicked green eyes which came flickering upwards, waving gently from side to side, until a foot or more of glossy scaly neck was visible. Slowly the vicious head came floating up, while at every oscillation a fresh burst of shrieks came from the settee.

"What in the name of mischief!" cried a voice, and there was the mistress of the house standing in the door. Her gaze at first had merely taken in the fact that two strangers were standing screaming upon her red plush sofa. A glance at the fireplace, however, showed her the cause of the terror, and she burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"Charley!" she shouted, "here's Eliza misbehaving again."

"I'll settle her," answered a masculine voice, and the young man dashed into the room. He had a brown horse-cloth in his hand, which he threw over the basket, making it fast with a piece of twine so as to effectually imprison its inmate, while his aunt ran across to reassure her visitors.

"It is only a rock snake," she explained.

"Oh, Bertha!" "Oh, Monica!" gasped the poor exhausted gentlewomen.

"She's hatching out some eggs; that is why we have the fire. Eliza always does better when she is

warm. She is a sweet gentle creature, but no doubt she thought that you had designs upon her eggs. I suppose that you did not touch any of them?"

"Oh, let us get away, Bertha!" cried Monica, with her thin black-gloved hands thrown forwards in abhorrence.

"Not away, but into the next room," said Mrs. Westmacott with the air of one whose word was law. "This way, if you please! It is less warm here." She led the way into a very handsomely-appointed library, with three great cases of books, and upon the fourth side a long yellow table littered over with papers and scientific instruments. "Sit here, and you there," she continued. "That is right. Now let me see, which of you is Miss Williams, and which Miss Bertha Williams?"

"I am Miss Williams," said Monica, still palpitating, and glancing furtively about in dread of some new horror.

"And you live, as I understand, over at the pretty little cottage. It is very nice of you to call so early. I don't suppose that we shall get on, but still the intention is equally good."

She crossed her legs and leaned her back against the marble mantelpiece.

"We thought that perhaps we might be of some assistance," said Bertha, timidly. "If there is anything which we could do to make you feel more at home ——"

"Oh! thank you, I am too old a traveller to feel anything but at home wherever I go. I've just come back from a few months in the Marquesas Islands, where I had a very pleasant visit. That was where

I got Eliza. In many respects the Marquesas Islands now lead the world."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Miss Williams. "In what respect?"

"In the relation of the sexes. They have worked out the great problem upon their own lines, and their isolated geographical position has helped them to come to a conclusion of their own. The woman there is, as she should be, in every way the absolute equal of the male. Come in, Charles, and sit down. Is Eliza all right?"

"All right, aunt."

"These are our neighbours, the Misses Williams. Perhaps they will have some stout. You might bring in a couple of bottles, Charles."

"No, no, thank you! None for us!" cried her two visitors, earnestly.

"No? I am sorry that I have no tea to offer you. I look upon the subserviency of woman as largely due to her abandoning nutritious drinks and invigorating exercises to the male. I do neither." She picked up a pair of fifteen-pound dumb-bells from beside the fireplace and swung them lightly about her head. "You see what may be done on stout," said she.

"But don't you think," the elder Miss Williams suggested timidly, "don't you think, Mrs. Westmacott, that woman has a mission of her own?"

The lady of the house dropped her dumb-bells with a crash upon the floor.

"The old cant!" she cried. "The old shibboleth! What is this mission which is reserved for woman? All that is humble, that is mean, that is soul-killing,

that is so contemptible and so ill-paid that none other will touch it. All that is woman's mission. And who imposed these limitations upon her? Who cooped her up within this narrow sphere? Was it Providence? Was it nature? No, it was the arch enemy. It was man."

"Oh, I say, auntie!" drawled her nephew.

"It was man, Charles. It was you and your fellows. I say that woman is a colossal monument to the selfishness of man. What is all this boasted chivalry—these fine words and vague phrases? Where is it when we wish to put it to the test? Man in the abstract will do anything to help a woman. Of course. How does it work when his pocket is touched? Where is his chivalry then? Will the doctors help her to qualify? will the lawyers help her to be called to the bar? will the clergy tolerate her in the Church? Oh, it is close your ranks then and refer poor woman to her mission! Her mission! To be thankful for coppers and not to interfere with the men while they grabble for gold, like swine round a trough, that is man's reading of the mission of woman. You may sit there and sneer, Charles, while you look upon your victim, but you know that it is truth, every word of it."

Terrified as they were by this sudden torrent of words, the two gentlewomen could not but smile at the sight of the fiery domineering victim and the big apologetic representative of mankind who sat meekly bearing all the sins of his sex. The lady struck a match, whipped a cigarettee from a case upon the mantelpiece, and began to draw the smoke into her lungs.

"I find it very soothing when my nerves are at all ruffled," she explained. "You don't smoke? Ah, you miss one of the purest of pleasures—one of the few pleasures which is without a reaction."

Miss Williams smoothed out her black silken lap.

"It is a pleasure," she said, with some approach to self-assertion, "which Bertha and I are rather too old-fashioned to enjoy."

"No doubt. It would probably make you very ill if you attempted it. By the way, I hope that you will come to some of our Guild meetings. I shall see that tickets are sent you."

"Your Guild?"

"It is not yet formed, but I shall lose no time in forming a committee. It is my habit to establish a branch of the Emancipation Guild wherever I go. There is a Mrs. Sanderson in Anerley who is already one of the emancipated, so that I have a nucleus. It is only by organised resistance, Miss Williams, that we can hope to hold our own against the selfish sex. Must you go, then?"

"Yes, we have one or two other visits to pay," said the elder sister. "You will, I am sure, excuse us. I hope that you will find Norwood a pleasant residence."

"All places are to me simply a battle-field," she answered, gripping first one and then the other with a grip which crumpled up their little thin fingers. "The days for work and healthful exercise, the evenings to Browning and high discourse, eh, Charles? Good-bye!"

She came to the door with them, and as they glanced back they saw her still standing there with

the yellow bull pup cuddled up under one forearm, and the thin blue reek of her cigarette ascending from her lips.

"Oh, what a dreadful, dreadful woman!" whispered sister Bertha, as they hurried down the street. "Thank goodness that it is over."

"But she'll return the visit," answered the other. "I think that we had better tell Mary that we are not at home."

CHAPTER III.

Dwellers in "The Wilderness."



HOW deeply are our destinies influenced by the most trifling causes! Had the unknown builder who erected and owned these new villas contented himself by simply building each within its own grounds, it is probable that these three small groups of people would have remained hardly conscious of each other's existence, and that there would have been no opportunity for that action and reaction which is here set forth. But there was a common link to bind them together. To single himself out from all other Norwood builders the landlord had devised and laid out a common lawn-tennis ground, which stretched behind the houses with taut-stretched net, green close-cropped sward, and wide-spread whitewashed lines. Hither in search of that hard exercise which is as necessary as air or food to the English temperament, came young Hay Denver when released from the toil of the City; hither, too, came Dr. Walker and his two fair daughters, Clara and Ida; and hither also, champions of the lawn, came the short-skirted muscular widow and her athletic nephew. Ere the summer was gone they

knew each other in this quiet nook as they might not have done after years of a stiffer and more formal acquaintance.

And especially to the admiral and the doctor were this closer intimacy and companionship of value. Each had a void in his life, as every man must have who with unexhausted strength steps out of the great race, but each by his society might help to fill up that of his neighbour. It is true that they had not much in common, but that is sometimes an aid rather than a bar to friendship. Each had been an enthusiast in his profession, and had retained all his interest in it. The doctor still read from cover to cover his *Lancet* and his *Medical Journal*, attended all professional gatherings, worked himself into an alternate state of exaltation and depression over the results of the election of officers, and reserved for himself a den of his own, in which, before rows of little round bottles full of glycerine, Canadian balsam, and staining agents, he still cut sections with a microtome, and peeped through his long brass old-fashioned microscope at the arcana of nature. With his typical face, clean-shaven on lip and chin, with a firm mouth, a strong jaw, a steady eye, and two little white fluffs of whiskers, he could never be taken for anything but what he was, a high-class British medical consultant of the age of fifty, or perhaps just a year or two older.

The doctor, in his hey-day, had been cool over great things, but now, in his retirement, he was fussy over trifles. The man who had operated without the quiver of a finger, when not only his patient's life but his own reputation and future were at stake,

was now shaken to the soul by a mislaid book or a careless maid. He remarked it himself, and knew the reason. "When Mary was alive," he would say, "she stood between me and the little troubles. I could brace myself for the big ones. My girls are as good as girls can be, but who can know a man as his wife knows him?" Then his memory would conjure up a tuft of brown hair and a single white thin hand over a coverlet, and he would feel, as we have all felt, that if we do not live and know each other after death, then indeed we are tricked and betrayed by all the highest hopes and subtlest intuitions of our nature.

The doctor had his compensations to make up for his loss. The great scales of Fate had been held on a level for him; for where in all great London could one find two sweeter girls, more loving, more intelligent, and more sympathetic than Clara and Ida Walker? So bright were they, so quick, so interested in all which interested him, that if it were possible for a man to be compensated for the loss of a good wife, then Balthazar Walker might claim to be so.

Clara was tall and thin and supple, with a graceful womanly figure. There was something stately and distinguished in her carriage; "queenly" her friends called her, while her critics described her as reserved and distant. Such as it was, however, it was part and parcel of herself; for she was, and had always from her childhood been, different to anyone around her. There was nothing gregarious in her nature. She thought with her own mind, saw with her own eyes, acted from her own impulse. Her

face was pale, striking rather than pretty, but with two great dark eyes, so earnestly questioning, so quick in their transitions from joy to pathos, so swift in their comment upon every word and deed around her, that those eyes alone were to many more attractive than all the beauty of her younger sister. Hers was a strong, quiet soul, and it was her firm hand which had taken over the duties of her mother, had ordered the house, restrained the servants, comforted her father, and upheld her weaker sister, from the day of that great misfortune.

Ida Walker was a hand's breadth smaller than Clara, but was a little fuller in the face and plumper in the figure. She had light yellow hair, mischievous blue eyes, with the light of humour ever twinkling in their depths, and a large, perfectly-formed mouth, with that slight upward curve of the corners which goes with a keen appreciation of fun, suggesting even in repose that a latent smile is ever lurking at the edges of the lips. She was modern to the soles of her dainty little high-heeled shoes, frankly fond of dress and of pleasure, devoted to tennis and to comic opera, delighted with a dance, which came in her way only too seldom, longing ever for some new excitement, and yet behind all this lighter side of her character a thoroughly good, healthy-minded English girl, the life and soul of the house, and the idol of her sister and her father. Such was the family at number two. A peep into the remaining villa and our introductions are complete.

Admiral Hay Denver did not belong to the florid, white-haired, hearty school of sea-dogs which is more common in works of fiction than in the Navy

List. On the contrary, he was the representative of a much more common type which is the antithesis of the conventional sailor. He was a thin, hard-featured man, with an ascetic aquiline cast of face, grizzled and hollow-cheeked, clean shaven, with the exception of the tiniest curved promontory of ash-coloured whisker. An observer, accustomed to classify men, might have put him down as a canon of the church with a taste for lay costume and a country life, or as the master of a large public school, who joined his scholars in their outdoor sports. His lips were firm, his chin prominent, he had a hard, dry eye, and his manner was precise and formal. Forty years of stern discipline had made him reserved and silent. Yet, when at his ease with an equal, he could readily assume a less quarter-deck style, and he had a fund of little dry stories of the world and its ways which were of interest from one who had seen so many phases of life. Dry and spare, as lean as a jockey, and as tough as whipcord, he might be seen any day swinging his silver-headed Malacca cane, and pacing along the suburban roads with the same measured gait with which he had been wont to tread the poop of his flagship. He wore a good-service stripe upon his cheek, for on one side it was pitted and scarred where a spurt of gravel knocked up by a round-shot had struck him thirty years before, when he served in the Lancaster gun-battery. Yet he was hale and sound; and though he was fifteen years senior to his friend the doctor, he might have passed as the younger man.

Mrs. Hay Denver's life had been a very broken

one, and her record upon land represented a greater amount of endurance and self-sacrifice than his upon the sea. They had been together for four months after their marriage, and then had come a hiatus of four years, during which he was flitting about between St. Helena and the Oil Rivers in a gunboat. Then came a blessed year of peace and domesticity, to be followed by nine years, with only a three months' break, five upon the Pacific station, and four on the East Indian. After that was a respite in the shape of five years in the Channel squadron, with periodical runs home, and then again he was off to the Mediterranean for three years and to Halifax for four. Now, at last, however, this old married couple, who were still almost strangers to one another, had come together in Norwood, where, if their short day had been chequered and broken, the evening at least promised to be sweet and mellow. In person Mrs. Hay Denver was tall and stout, with a bright, round, ruddy-cheeked face still pretty, with a gracious matronly comeliness. Her whole life was a round of devotion and of love, which was divided between her husband and her only son, Harold.

This son it was who kept them in the neighbourhood of London, for the admiral was as fond of ships and of salt water as ever, and was as happy in the sheets of a two-ton yacht as on the bridge of his sixteen-knot monitor. Had he been untied, the Devonshire or Hampshire coast would certainly have been his choice. There was Harold, however, and Harold's interests were their chief care. Harold was four-and-twenty now. Three years before he

had been taken in hand by an acquaintance of his father's, the head of a considerable firm of stock-brokers, and fairly launched upon 'Change. His three hundred guinea entrance fee paid, his three sureties of five hundred pounds each, found his name approved by the Committee, and all other formalities complied with, he found himself whirling round, an insignificant unit, in the vortex of the money market of the world. There, under the guidance of his father's friend, he was instructed in the mysteries of bulling and of bearing, in the strange usages of 'Change, in the intricacies of carrying over and of transferring. He learned to know where to place his clients' money, which of the jobbers would make a price in New Zealands, and which would touch nothing but American rails, which might be trusted and which shunned. All this, and much more, he mastered, and to such purpose that he soon began to prosper, to retain the clients who had been recommended to him, and to attract fresh ones. But the work was never congenial. He had inherited from his father his love of the air of heaven, his affection for a manly and natural existence. To act as middle-man between the pursuer of wealth and the wealth which he pursued, or to stand as a human barometer, registering the rise and fall of the great mammon pressure in the markets, was not the work for which Providence had placed those broad shoulders and strong limbs upon his well-knit frame. His dark open face, too, with his straight Grecian nose, well-opened brown eyes, and round black-curled head, were all those of a man who was fashioned for active physical work. Meanwhile he was popular with his

fellow-brokers, respected by his clients, and beloved at home; but his spirit was restless within him, and his mind chafed unceasingly against his surroundings.

"Do you know, Willy," said Mrs. Hay Denver, one evening as she stood behind her husband's chair, with her hand upon his shoulder, "I think sometimes that Harold is not quite happy."

"He looks happy, the young rascal," answered the admiral, pointing with his cigar. It was after dinner, and through the open French window of the dining-room a clear view was to be had of the tennis-court and the players. A set had just been finished, and young Charles Westmacott was hitting up the balls as high as he could send them in the middle of the ground. Doctor Walker and Mrs. Westmacott were pacing up and down the lawn, the lady waving her racket as she emphasised her remarks, and the doctor listening with slanting head and little nods of agreement. Against the rails at the near end Harold was leaning in his flannels talking to the two sisters, who stood listening to him with their long dark shadows streaming down the lawn behind them. The girls were dressed alike in dark skirts, with light pink tennis blouses and pink bands on their straw hats, so that as they stood with the soft red of the setting sun tinging their faces, Clara demure and quiet, Ida mischievous and daring, it was a group which might have pleased the eye of a more exacting critic than the old sailor.

"Yes, he looks happy, mother," he repeated with a chuckle. "It is not so long ago since it was you and I who were standing like that, and I don't

remember that we were very unhappy either. It was croquet in our time, and the ladies had not reefed in their skirts quite so taut. What year would it be? Just before the commission of the *Penelope*."

Mrs. Hay Denver ran her fingers through his grizzled hair.



"Doctor Walker and Mrs. Westmacott were pacing up and down the lawn."

"It was when you came back in the *Antelope*, just before you got your step."

"Ah, the old *Antelope!* What a clipper she was! She could sail two points nearer the wind than any-

thing of her tonnage in the service. You remember her, mother. You saw her come into Plymouth Bay. Wasnt't she a beauty?"

"She was indeed, dear. But when I say that I think that Harold is not happy, I mean in his daily life. Has it never struck you how thoughtful he is at times, and how absent-minded?"

"In love, perhaps, the young dog. He seems to have found snug moorings now, at any rate."

"I think that it is very likely that you are right, Willy," answered the mother seriously.

"But with which of them?"

"I cannot tell."

"Well, they are very charming girls, both of them. But as long as he hangs in the wind between the two it cannot be serious. After all, the boy is four-and-twenty, and he made five hundred pounds last year. He is better able to marry than I was when I was lieutenant."

"I think that we can see which it is now," remarked the observant mother.

Charles Westmacott had ceased to knock the tennis balls about, and was chatting with Clara Walker, while Ida and Harold Denver were still talking by the railing with little outbursts of laughter. Presently a fresh set was formed, and Dr. Walker, the odd man out, came through the wicket gate and strolled up the garden walk.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Hay Denver," said he, raising his broad straw hat. "May I come in?"

"Good-evening, doctor. Pray do."

"Try one of these," said the admiral, holding out his cigar-case. "They are not bad. I got them on

the Mosquito coast. I was thinking of signalling to you, but you seemed so very happy out there."

"Mrs. Westmacott is a very clever woman," said the doctor, lighting the cigar. "By the way, you spoke about the Mosquito coast just now. Did you see much of the Hyla when you were out there?"

"No such name on the list," answered the seaman, with decision. "There's the *Hydra*, a harbour defence turret-ship, but she never leaves the home waters."

The doctor laughed.

"We live in two separate worlds," said he. "The Hyla is the little green tree frog, and Beale has founded some of his views on protoplasm upon the appearance of its nerve cells. It is a subject in which I take an interest."

"There were vermin of all sorts in the woods. When I have been on river service I have heard it at night like the engine-room when you are on the measured mile. You can't sleep for the piping and croaking and chirping. Great Scott! what a woman that is! She was across the lawn in three jumps! She would have made a captain of the foretop in the old days!"

"She is a very remarkable woman."

"A very cranky one."

"A very sensible one in some things," remarked Mrs. Hay Denver.

"Look at that now!" cried the admiral, with a lunge of his forefinger at the doctor. "You mark my words, Walker, if we don't look out that woman will raise a mutiny with her preaching. Here's my wife disaffected already, and your girls will be no

better. We must combine, man, or there 's an end of all discipline."

"No doubt she is a little excessive in her views," said the doctor; "but in the main I think as she does."

"Bravo, doctor!" cried the lady.

"What, turned traitor to your sex! We 'll court-martial you as a deserter."

"She is quite right. The professions are not sufficiently open to women. They are still far too much circumscribed in their employments. They are a feeble folk, the women who have to work for their bread—poor, unorganised, timid, taking as a favour what they might demand as a right. That is why their case is not more constantly before the public, for if their cry for redress was as great as their grievance it would fill the world to the exclusion of all others. It is all very well for us to be courteous to the rich, the refined, those to whom life is already made easy. It is a mere form, a trick of manner. If we are truly courteous, we shall stoop to lift up struggling womanhood when she really needs our help—when it is life and death to her whether she has it or not. And then to cant about it being unwomanly to work in the higher professions. It is womanly enough to starve, but unwomanly to use the brains which God has given them. Is it not a monstrous contention?"

The admiral chuckled.

"You are like one of those phonographs, Walker," said he, "you have had all this talked into you, and now you are reeling it off again. It 's rank mutiny, every word of it, for man has his duties and woman

has hers, but they are as separate as their natures are. I suppose that we shall have a woman hoisting her pennant on the flagship presently, and taking command of the Channel Squadron."

"Well, you have a woman on the throne taking command of the whole nation," remarked his wife; "and everybody is agreed that she does it better than any of the men."

The admiral was somewhat staggered by this homethrust.

"That 's quite another thing," said he.

"You should come to their next meeting. I am to take the chair. I have just promised Mrs. Westmacott that I will do so. But it has turned chilly, and it is time that the girls were indoors. Good-night! I shall look out for you after breakfast for our constitutional, admiral."

The old sailor looked after his friend with a twinkle in his eyes.

"How old is he, mother?"

"About fifty, I think."

"And Mrs. Westmacott?"

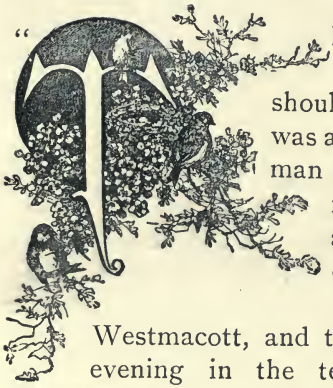
"I heard that she was forty-three."

The admiral rubbed his hands, and shook with amusement.

"We 'll find one of these days that three and two make one," said he. "I 'll bet you a new bonnet on it, mother."

CHAPTER IV.

A Sister's Secret.



"TELL me, Miss Walker; you know how things should be. What would you say was a good profession for a young man of twenty-six who has had no education worth speaking about, and who is not very quick by nature?"

The speaker was Charles Westmacott, and the time this same summer evening in the tennis-ground, though the shadows had fallen now and the game been abandoned.

The girl glanced up at him, amused and surprised.

"Do you mean yourself?"

"Precisely."

"But how could I tell?"

"I have no one to advise me. I believe that you could do it better than anyone. I feel confidence in your opinion."

"It is very flattering." She glanced up again at his earnest, questioning face, with its Saxon eyes and drooping flaxen moustache, in some doubt as to whether he might be joking. On the contrary, all his attention seemed to be concentrated upon her answer. "It depends so much upon what you can

do, you know. I do not know you sufficiently to be able to say what natural gifts you have."

They were walking slowly across the lawn in the direction of the house.

"I have none. That is to say, none worth mentioning. I have no memory, and I am very slow."

"But you are very strong."

"Oh, if that goes for anything, I can put up a hundred-pound bar till further orders; but what sort of a calling is that?"

Some little joke about being called to the bar flickered up in Miss Walker's mind, but her companion was in such obvious earnest that she stifled down her inclination to laugh.

"I can do a mile on the cinder-track in 4.50, and across-country in 5.20, but how is that to help me? I might be a cricket professional, but it is not a very dignified position. Not that I care a straw about dignity, you know, but I should not like to hurt the old lady's feelings."

"Your aunt's?"

"Yes, my aunt's. My parents were killed in the Mutiny, you know, when I was a baby; and she has looked after me ever since. She has been very good to me. I'm sorry to leave her."

"But why should you leave her?"

They had reached the garden gate, and the girl leaned her racket upon the top of it, looking up with grave interest at her big white-flannelled companion.

"It's Browning," said he

"What!"

"Don't tell my aunt that I said it," he sank his voice to a whisper; "I hate Browning!"

Clara Walker rippled off into such a merry peal of laughter that he forgot the evil things which he had suffered from the poet, and burst out laughing too.

"I can't make him out," said he. "I try, but he is one too many. No doubt it is very stupid of me; I don't deny it. But as long as I cannot, there is no use pretending that I can. And then of course she feels hurt, for she is very fond of him, and likes to read him aloud in the evenings. She is reading a piece now, 'Pippa Passes,' and I assure you, Miss Walker, that I don't even know what the title means. You must think me a dreadful fool."

"But surely he is not so incomprehensible as all that?" she said, as an attempt at encouragement.

"He is very bad. There are some things, you know, which are fine. That ride of the three Dutchmen, and Hervé Riel and others, they are all right. But there was a piece we read last week. The first line stumped my aunt, and it takes a good deal to do that, for she rides very straight. 'Setebos and Setebos and Setebos,' that was the line."

"It sounds like a charm."

"No, it is a gentleman's name. Three gentlemen, I thought at first, but my aunt says one. Then he goes on, 'Thinketh he dwelleth in the light of the moon.' It was a very trying piece."

Clara Walker laughed again.

"You must not think of leaving your aunt," she said. "Think how lonely she would be without you."

"Well, yes, I have thought of that. But you must remember that my aunt is to all intents hardly middle-aged, and a very eligible person. I don't think that her dislike to mankind extends to individuals. She might form new ties, and then I should be a third wheel in the coach. It was all very well as long as I was only a boy, when her first husband was alive."

"But, good gracious, you don't mean that Mrs. Westmacott is going to marry again?" gasped Clara.

The young man glanced down at her with a question in his eyes.

"Oh, it is only a remote possibility, you know," said he. "Still, of course, it might happen, and I should like to know what I ought to turn my hand to."

"I wish I could help you," said Clara. "But I really know very little about such things. However, I could talk to my father, who knows a very great deal of the world."

"I wish you would. I should be so glad if you would."

"Then I certainly will. And now I must say good-night, Mr. Westmacott, for papa will be wondering where I am."

"Good-night, Miss Walker."

He pulled off his flannel cap, and stalked away through the gathering darkness.

Clara had imagined that they had been the last on the lawn, but, looking back from the steps which led up to the French windows, she saw two dark figures moving across towards the house. As they came nearer she could distinguish that they were

Harold Denver and her sister Ida. The murmur of their voices rose up to her ears, and then the musical little childlike laugh which she knew so well. "I am so delighted," she heard her sister say. "So pleased and proud. I had no idea of it. Your words were such a surprise and a joy to me. Oh, I am so glad!"

"Is that you, Ida?"

"Oh! there is Clara. I must go in, Mr. Denver. Good-night!"

There were a few whispered words, a laugh from Ida, and a "Good-night, Miss Walker," out of the darkness. Clara took her sister's hand, and they passed together through the long folding window. The doctor had gone into his study, and the dining-room was empty. A single small red lamp upon the sideboard was reflected tenfold by the plate about it and the mahogany beneath it, though its single wick cast but a feeble light into the large dimly shadowed room. Ida danced off to the big central lamp, but Clara put her hand upon her arm.

"I rather like this quiet light," said she. "Why should we not have a chat?"

She sat in the doctor's large red-plush chair, and her sister cuddled down upon the footstool at her feet, glancing up at her elder with a smile upon her lips and a mischievous gleam in her eyes. There was a shade of anxiety in Clara's face, which cleared away as she gazed into her sister's frank blue eyes.

"Have you anything to tell me, dear?" she asked.

Ida gave a little pout and shrug to her shoulders.

"The Solicitor-General then opened the case for

the prosecution," said she. "You are going to cross-examine me, Clara, so don't deny it. I do wish you would have that grey satin foulard of yours done up. With a little trimming and a new white vest it would look as good as new, and it really is very dowdy."

"You were quite late upon the lawn," said the inexorable Clara.

"Yes, I was rather. So were you. Have you anything to tell me?"

She broke away into her merry, musical laugh.

"I was chatting with Mr. Westmacott."

"And I was chatting with Mr. Denver. By the way, Clara, now tell me truly, what do you think of Mr. Denver? Do you like him? Honestly, now!"

"I like him very much indeed. I think that he is one of the most gentlemanly, modest, manly, young men that I have ever known. So now, dear, have you nothing to tell me?"

Clara smoothed down her sister's golden hair with a motherly gesture, and stooped her face to catch the expected confidence. She could wish nothing better than that Ida should be the wife of Harold Denver, and from the words which she had overheard as they left the lawn that evening, she could not doubt that there was some understanding between them.

But there came no confession from Ida. Only the same mischievous smile and amused gleam in her deep blue eyes.

"That grey foulard dress——" she began.

"Oh, you little tease! Come now, I will ask

you what you have just asked me. Do you like Harold Denver?"

"Oh, he's a darling!"

"Ida!"

"Well, you asked me. That's what I think of him. And now, you dear old inquisitive, you will



"I'm going off to see what papa is doing."

get nothing more out of me, so you must just wait and not be too curious. I'm going off to see what papa is doing."

She sprang to her feet, threw her arms round her sister's neck, gave her a final squeeze, and was gone. A chorus from *Olivette*, sung in her clear contralto,

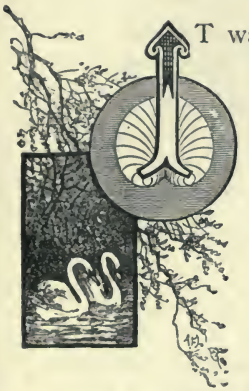
grew fainter and fainter, until it ended in the slam of a distant door.

But Clara Walker still sat in the dim-lit room, with her chin upon her hands, and her dreamy eyes looking out into the gathering gloom. It was the duty of her, a maiden, to play the part of a mother —to guide another in paths which her own steps had not yet trodden. Since her mother died, not a thought had been given to herself, all was for her father and her sister. In her own eyes she was herself very plain, and she knew that her manner was often ungracious when she would most wish to be gracious. She saw her face as the glass reflected it, but she did not see the changing play of expression which gave it its charm—the infinite pity, the sympathy, the sweet womanliness which drew towards her all who were in doubt and in trouble, even as poor slow-moving Charles Westmacott had been drawn to her that night. She was herself, she thought, outside the pale of love. But it was very different with Ida, merry, little, quick-witted, bright-faced Ida. She was born for love; it was her inheritance. But she was young and innocent. She must not be allowed to venture too far without help in those dangerous waters. Some understanding there was between her and Harold Denver. In her heart of hearts Clara, like every good woman, was a matchmaker, and already she had chosen Denver of all men as the one to whom she could most safely confide Ida. He had talked to her more than once on the serious topics of life, on his aspirations, on what a man could do to leave the world the better for his presence. She knew that he was a man of a noble

nature, high-minded and earnest. And yet she did not like this secrecy, this disinclination upon the part of one so frank and honest as Ida to tell her what was passing. She would wait, and if she got the opportunity next day she would lead Harold Denver himself on to this topic. It was possible that she might learn from him what her sister had refused to tell her.

CHAPTER V.

A Naval Conquest.



IT was the habit of the doctor and the admiral to accompany each other upon a morning ramble between breakfast and lunch. The dwellers in those quiet tree-lined roads were accustomed to see the two figures —the long, thin, austere seaman, and the short, bustling tweed-clad physician — pass and repass with such regularity that a stopped clock has been reset by them. The admiral took two steps to his companion's three, but the younger man was the quicker, and both were equal to a good four and a half miles an hour.

It was a lovely summer day which followed the events which have been described. The sky was of the deepest blue, with a few white fleecy clouds drifting lazily across it, and the air was filled with the low drone of insects or with a sudden sharper note as bee or bluefly shot past with its quivering long-drawn hum, like an insect tuning-fork. As the friends topped each rise which leads up to the Crystal Palace, they could see the dun clouds of London stretching along the northern skyline, with spire or dome breaking through the low-lying haze. The admiral was in high spirits, for the morning post had brought good news to his son.

"It is wonderful, Walker," he was saying, "positively wonderful, the way that boy of mine has gone ahead during the last three years. We heard from Pearson to-day. Pearson is the senior partner, you know, and my boy the junior—Pearson and Denver the firm. Cunning old dog is Pearson, as cute and as greedy as a Rio shark. Yet he goes off for a fortnight's leave, and puts my boy in full charge, with all that immense business in his hands, and a free hand to do what he likes with it. How 's that for confidence, and he only three years upon 'Change?"

"Anyone would confide in him: his face is a surety," said the doctor.

"Go on, Walker!" The admiral dug his elbow at him. "You know my weak side. Still it 's truth all the same. I 've been blessed with a good wife and a good son, and maybe I relish them the more for having been cut off from them so long. I have much to be thankful for!"

"And so have I—the best two girls that ever stepped. There 's Clara who has learned up as much medicine as would give her the L.S.A., simply in order that she may sympathise with me in my work. But, hullo! what is this coming along?"

"All drawing and the wind astern!" cried the admiral. "Fourteen knots, if it 's one. Why, by George, it is that woman!"

A rolling cloud of yellow dust had streamed round the curve of the road, and from the heart of it had emerged a high tandem tricycle flying along at a breakneck pace. In front sat Mrs. Westmacott, clad in a heather tweed pea-jacket, a skirt which

just passed her knees, and a pair of thick gaiters of the same material. She had a great bundle of red papers under her arm, while Charles, who sat behind her clad in Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, bore a similar roll protruding from either pocket. Even as they watched, the pair eased up; the lady sprang off, impaled one of her bills upon the garden railing of an empty house, and then, jumping on to her seat again, was about to hurry onwards when her nephew drew her attention to the two gentlemen upon the footpath.

"Oh! now, really I didn't notice you," said she, taking a few turns of the treadle and steering the machine across to them. "Is it not a beautiful morning?"

"Lovely," answered the doctor. "You seem to be very busy."

"I *am* very busy." She pointed to the coloured paper which still fluttered from the railing. "We have been pushing our propaganda, you see. Charles and I have been at it since seven o'clock. It is about our meeting. I wish it to be a great success. See!" She smoothed out one of the bills, and the doctor read his own name in great black letters across the bottom. "We don't forget our chairman, you see. Everybody is coming. Those two dear little old maids opposite, the Williamses, held out for some time; but I have their promise now. Admiral, I am sure that you wish us well."

"Hum! I wish you no harm, ma'am."

"You will come on the platform?"

"I'll be —— No, I don't think I can do that."

"To our meeting, then?"

"No, ma'am; I don't go out after dinner."

"Oh yes! you will come. I will call in, if I may, and chat it over with you when you come home. We have not breakfasted yet. Good-bye!"

There was a whirl of wheels, and the yellow cloud rolled away down the road again. By some legerdemain the admiral found that he was clutching in his right hand one of the obnoxious bills. He crumpled it up, and threw it into the roadway.

"I'll be hanged if I go, Walker," said he, as he resumed his walk. "I've never been hustled into doing a thing yet, whether by woman or man."

"I'm not a betting man," answered the doctor, "but I rather think that the odds are in favour of your going."

The admiral had hardly got home, and had just seated himself in his dining-room, when the attack upon him was renewed. He was slowly and lovingly unfolding *The Times*, preparatory to the long read which led up to luncheon, and had even got so far as to fasten his golden pince-nez on to his thin high-bridged nose, when he heard a scrunching of gravel, and, looking over the top of his paper, saw Mrs. Westmacott coming up the garden walk. She was still dressed in the singular costume which offended the sailor's old-fashioned notions of propriety, but he could not deny, as he looked at her, that she was a very fine woman. In many climes he had looked upon women of all shades and ages, but never upon a more clear-cut, handsome face, nor a more erect, supple, and womanly figure. He ceased to glower as he gazed upon her, and the frown was smoothed away from his rugged brow.

"May I come in?" said she, framing herself in the open window, with a background of green sward and blue sky. "I feel like an invader deep in an enemy's country."

"It is a very welcome invasion, ma'am," said he, clearing his throat and pulling at his high collar. "Try this garden chair. What is there that I can do for you? Shall I ring and let Mrs. Denver know that you are here?"

"Pray do not trouble, admiral. I only looked in with reference to our little chat this morning. I wish that you would give us your powerful support at our coming meeting for the improvement of the condition of woman."

"No, ma'am, I can't do that."

He pursed up his lips and shook his grizzled head.

"And why not?"

"Against my principles, ma'am."

"But why?"

"Because woman has her duties and man has his. I may be old-fashioned, but that is my view. Why, what is the world coming to? I was saying to Dr. Walker only last night that we shall have a woman wanting to command the Channel Fleet next."

"That is one of the few professions which cannot be improved," said Mrs. Westmacott with her sweetest smile. "Poor woman must still look to man for protection."

"I don't like these new-fangled ideas, ma'am; I tell you honestly that I don't. I like discipline, and I think everyone is the better for it. Women have

got a great deal which they had not in the days of our fathers. They have universities all for themselves, I am told; and there are women doctors, I hear. Surely they should rest contented. What more can they want?"

"You are a sailor, and sailors are always chivalrous. If you could see how things really are, you would change your opinion. What are the poor things to do? There are so many of them, and so few things to which they can turn their hands. Governesses? But there are hardly any situations. Music and drawing? There is not one in fifty who has any special talent in that direction. Medicine? It is still surrounded with difficulties for women, and it takes many years and a small fortune to qualify. Nursing? It is hard work ill paid, and none but the strongest can stand it. What would you have them do then, admiral? Sit down and starve?"

"Tut, tut! It is not so bad as that."

"The pressure is terrible. Advertise for a lady companion at ten shillings a week, which is less than a cook's wage, and see how many answers you get. There is no hope, no outlook, for these struggling thousands. Life is a dull, sordid struggle, leading down to a cheerless old age. Yet when we try to bring some little ray of hope—some chance, however distant, of something better—we are told by chivalrous gentlemen that it is against their principles to help."

The admiral winced, but shook his head in dissent.

"There is banking, the law, veterinary surgery, Government offices, the Civil Service—all these at

least should be thrown freely open to women, if they have brains enough to compete successfully for them. Then if woman were unsuccessful it would be her own fault, and the majority of the population of this country could no longer complain that they live under a different law to the minority, and that they are held down in poverty and serfdom, with every road to independence sealed to them."

"What would you propose to do, ma'am?"

"To set the more obvious injustices right, and so to pave the way for a reform. Now look at that man digging in the field. I know him. He can neither read nor write, he is steeped in whisky, and he has as much intelligence as the potatoes that he is digging. Yet the man has a vote, can possibly turn the scale of an election, and may help to decide the policy of this empire. Now, to take the nearest example, here am I, a woman who have had some education, who have travelled, and who have seen and studied the institutions of many countries. I hold considerable property, and I pay more in Imperial taxes than that man spends in whisky, which is saying a great deal, and yet I have no more direct influence upon the disposal of the money which I pay than that fly which creeps along the wall. Is that right? Is it fair?"

The admiral moved uneasily in his chair.

"Yours is an exceptional case," said he.

"But no woman has a voice. Consider that the women are a majority in the nation. Yet if there was a question of legislation upon which all the women were agreed upon one side and all the men upon the other, it would appear that the matter

was settled unanimously when more than half the population were opposed to it. Is that right?"

Again the admiral wriggled. It was very awkward for the gallant seaman to have a handsome woman opposite to him, bombarding him with questions to none of which he could find an answer. "Couldn't even get the tompions out of his guns," as he explained the matter to the doctor that evening.

"Now those are really the points that we shall lay stress upon at the meeting: the free and complete opening of the professions, the final abolition of the zenana I call it, and the franchise to all women who pay Queen's taxes above a certain sum. Surely there is nothing unreasonable in that—nothing which could offend your principles. We shall have medicine, law, and the church all rallying that night for the protection of woman. Is the navy to be the one profession absent?"

The admiral jumped out of his chair with an evil word in his throat.

"There, there, ma'am!" he cried; "drop it for a time. I have heard enough. You've turned me a point or two, I won't deny it; but let it stand at that. I will think it over."

"Certainly, admiral! We would not hurry you in your decision; but we still hope to see you on our platform."

She rose and moved about in her lounging masculine fashion from one picture to another, for the walls were thickly covered with reminiscences of the admiral's voyages.

"Hullo!" said she. "Surely this ship would have furled all her lower canvas and reefed her top-

sails if she found herself on a lee shore with the wind on her quarter."

"Of course she would. The artist was never past Gravesend, I swear. It's the *Penelope* as she was on the 14th of June, 1857, in the throat of the Straits of Banca, with the Island of Banca on the starboard bow and Sumatra on the port. He painted it from description; but of course, as you very sensibly say, all was snug below, and she carried storm sails and double-reefed topsails, for it was blowing a cyclone from the sou'-east. I compliment you, ma'am; I do, indeed!"

"Oh, I have done a little sailoring myself—as much as a woman can aspire to, you know. This is the Bay of Funchal. What a lovely frigate!"

"Lovely, you say! Ah! she was lovely. That is the *Andromeda*. I was a mate aboard of her—sub-lieutenant they call it now, though I like the old name best."

"What a lovely rake her masts have, and what a curve to her bows! She must have been a clipper."

The old sailor rubbed his hands and his eyes glistened. His old ships bordered close upon his wife and his son in his affections.

"I know Funchal," said the lady, carelessly. "A couple of years ago I had a 7-ton cutter-rigged yacht, the *Banshee*, and we ran over to Madeira from Falmouth."

"You, ma'am, in a 7-tonner?"

"With a couple of Cornish lads for a crew. Oh, it was glorious! A fortnight right out in the open, with no worries, no letters, no callers, no petty

thoughts; nothing but the grand works of God—the tossing sea and the great silent sky. They talk of riding—indeed, I am fond of horses, too—but what is there to compare with the swoop of a little craft as she pitches down the long steep side of a wave, and then the quiver and spring as she is tossed upwards again? Oh, if our souls could transmigrate, I'd be a seamew above all birds that fly! But I keep you, admiral. Adieu!"

The old sailor was too transported with sympathy to say a word. He could only shake her broad muscular hand. She was half-way down the garden path before she heard him calling her, and saw his grizzled head and weather-stained face looking out from behind the curtains.

"You may put me down for the platform," he cried, and vanished abashed behind the curtain of his *Times*, where his wife found him at lunch time.

"I hear that you have had quite a long chat with Mrs. Westmacott," said she.

"Yes, and I think that she is one of the most sensible women that I ever knew."

"Except on the woman's rights question, of course."

"Oh! I don't know. She has a good deal to say for herself on that also. In fact, mother, I have taken a platform ticket for her meeting."

CHAPTER VI.

An Old Story.



UT this was not to be the only eventful conversation which Mrs. Westmacott held that day, nor was the admiral the only person in "The Wilderness" who was destined to find his opinions considerably changed. Two neighbouring families, the Winslows from Anerley and the Cumberbatches from Gipsy Hill, had been invited to tennis by Mrs. Wesmacott, and the lawn was gay in the evening with the blazers of the young men and the bright dresses of the girls. To the older people, sitting round in their wicker-work garden chairs, the darting, stooping, springing white figures, the sweep of skirts and twinkle of canvas shoes, the click of the rackets and sharp whizz of the balls, with the continual "fifteen—love, fifteen—all!" of the marker, made up a merry and exhilarating scene. To see their sons and daughters so flushed and healthy and happy gave them also a reflected glow, and it was hard to say who had most pleasure from the game—those who played or those who watched.

Mrs. Westmacott had just finished a set when she caught a glimpse of Clara Walker sitting alone at the farther end of the ground. She ran down the court, cleared the net, to the amazement of the visitors, and seated herself beside her. Clara's re-

served and refined nature shrank somewhat from the boisterous frankness and strange manners of the widow, and yet her feminine instinct told her that beneath all her peculiarities there lay much that was good and noble. She smiled up at her therefore, and nodded a greeting.

"Why aren't you playing then? Don't, for goodness' sake, begin to be languid and young ladyish! When you give up active sports, you give up youth."

"I have played a set, Mrs. Westmacott."

"That's right, my dear." She sat down beside her, and tapped her upon the arm with her tennis racket. "I like you, my dear, and I am going to call you Clara. You are not as aggressive as I should wish, Clara; but still I like you very much. Self-sacrifice is all very well, you know; but we have had rather too much of it on our side, and should like to see a little on the other. What do you think of my nephew Charles?"

The question was so sudden and unexpected that Clara gave quite a jump in her chair.

"I—I—I hardly ever have thought of your nephew Charles."

"No? Oh! you must think him well over, for I want to speak to you about him."

"To me? But why?"

"It seemed to me most delicate. You see, Clara, the matter stands in this way. It is quite possible that I may soon find myself in a completely new sphere of life, which will involve fresh duties and make it impossible for me to keep up a household which Charles can share."

Clara stared. Did this mean that she was about to marry again? What else could it point to?

"Therefore Charles must have a household of his own. That is obvious. Now, I don't approve of bachelor establishments. Do you?"

"Really, Mrs. Westmacott, I have never thought of the matter."

"Oh, you little sly puss! Was there ever a girl who never thought of the matter? I think that a young man of six-and-twenty ought to be married."

Clara felt very uncomfortable. The awful thought had come upon her that this ambassadress had come to her as a proxy with a proposal of marriage. But how could that be? She had not spoken more than three or four times with her nephew, and knew nothing more of him than he had told her on the evening before. It was impossible then. And yet, what could his aunt mean by this discussion of his private affairs?

"Do you not think yourself," she persisted, "that a young man of six-and-twenty is better married?"

"I should think that he is old enough to decide for himself."

"Yes, yes. He has done so. But Charles is just a little shy, just a little slow in expressing himself. I thought that I would pave the way for him. Two women can arrange these things so much better. Men sometimes have a difficulty in making themselves clear.

"I really hardly follow you, Mrs. Westmacott," cried Clara in despair.

"He has no profession; but he has nice tastes. He reads Browning every night. And he is most amazingly strong. When he was younger we used to put on the gloves together, but I cannot persuade him to now; for he says he cannot play light enough. I should allow him five hundred, which should be enough at first."

"My dear Mrs. Westmacott," cried Clara, "I assure you that I have not the least idea what it is that you are talking of."

"Do you think your sister Ida would have my nephew Charles?"

Her sister Ida? Quite a little thrill of relief and of pleasure ran through her at the thought. Ida and Charles Westmacott. She had never thought of it. And yet they had been a good deal together. They had played tennis; they had shared the tandem tricycle. Again came the thrill of joy, and close at its heels the cold questionings of conscience. Why this joy? What was the real source of it? Was it that deep down, somewhere pushed back in the black recesses of the soul, there was the thought lurking that if Charles prospered in his wooing then Harold Denver would still be free? How mean, how unmaidenly, how unsisterly the thought! She crushed it down and thrust it aside, but still it would push up its wicked little head. She crimsoned with shame at her own baseness as she turned once more to her companion.

"I really do not know," she said.

"She is not engaged?"

"Not that I know of."

"You speak hesitatingly."

"Because I am not sure. But he may ask. She cannot but be flattered."

"Quite so. I tell him that it is the most practical compliment which a man can pay to a woman. He is a little shy, but when he sets himself to do it he will do it. He is very much in love with her, I assure you. These little lively people always do attract the slow and heavy ones, which is nature's device for the neutralising of bores. But they are all going in. I think if you will allow me that I will just take the opportunity to tell him that, as far as you know, there is no positive obstacle in the way."

"As far as I know," Clara repeated, as the widow moved away to where the players were grouped round the net, or sauntering slowly towards the house. She rose to follow her, but her head was in a whirl with new thoughts, and she sat down again. Which would be the best for Ida, Harold or Charles? She thought it over with as much solicitude as a mother who plans for her only child. Harold had seemed to her to be in many ways the noblest and best young man whom she had known. If ever she was to love a man it would be such a man as that. But she must not think of herself. She had reason to believe that both these men loved her sister. Which would be the best for her? But perhaps the matter was already decided. She could not forget the scrap of conversation which she had heard the night before, nor the secret which her sister had refused to confide to her. If Ida would not tell her, there was but one person who could. She raised her eyes, and there was Harold Denver standing before her.

"You were lost in your thoughts," said he, smiling. "I hope that they were pleasant ones."

"Oh, I was planning," said she, rising. "It seems rather a waste of time, as a rule, for things have a way of working themselves out just as you least expect."

"What were you planning, then?"

"The future."

"Whose?"

"Oh, my own and Ida's."

"And was I included in your joint futures?"

"I hope all our friends were included."

"Don't go in," said he, as she began to move slowly towards the house. "I wanted to have a word. Let us stroll up and down the lawn. Perhaps you are cold. If you are, I could bring you out a shawl."

"Oh, no, I am not cold."

"I was speaking to your sister Ida last night."

She noticed that there was a slight quiver in his voice, and, glancing up at his dark, clear-cut face, she saw that he was very grave. She felt that it was settled, that he had come to ask her for her sister's hand.

"She is a charming girl," said he, after a pause.

"Indeed she is," cried Clara, warmly. "And no one who has not lived with her and known her intimately can tell how charming and good she is. She is like a sunbeam in the house."

"No one who was not good could be so absolutely happy as she seems to be. Heaven's last gift, I think, is a mind so pure and a spirit so high that it is unable even to see what is impure and evil in the

world around us. For as long as we can see it, how can we be truly happy?"

"She has a deeper side also. She does not turn it to the world, and it is not natural that she should, for she is very young. But she thinks, and has aspirations of her own."

"You cannot admire her more than I do. Indeed, Miss Walker, I only ask to be brought into nearer relationship with her, and to feel that there is a permanent bond between us."

It had come at last. For a moment her heart was numbed within her, and then a flood of sisterly love carried all before it. Down with that dark thought which would still try to raise its unhallowed head! She turned to Harold with sparkling eyes and words of pleasure upon her lips.

"I should wish to be near and dear to both of you," said he, as he took her hand. "I should wish Ida to be my sister, and you my wife."

She said nothing. She only stood looking at him with parted lips and great dark, questioning eyes. The lawn had vanished away, the sloping gardens, the brick villas, the darkening sky with half a pale moon beginning to show over the chimney-pots. All was gone, and she was only conscious of a dark, earnest, pleading face, and of a voice, far away, disconnected from herself, the voice of a man telling a woman how he loved her. He was unhappy, said the voice, his life was a void; there was but one thing that could save him; he had come to the parting of the ways—here lay happiness and honour, and all that was high and noble; there lay the soul-killing round, the lonely

life, the base pursuit of money, the sordid, selfish aims. He needed but the hand of the woman that he loved to lead him into the better path. And how he loved her his life would show. He loved her for her sweetness, for her womanliness, for her strength. He had need of her. Would she not come to him? And then of a sudden, as she listened, it came home to her that the man was Harold Denver, and that she was the woman, and that all God's work was very beautiful—the green sward beneath her feet, the rustling leaves, the long orange slashes in the western sky. She spoke; she scarce knew what the broken words were, but she saw the light of joy shine out on his face, and her hand was still in his as they wandered amid the twilight. They said no more now, but only wandered and felt each other's presence. All was fresh around them, familiar and yet new, tinged with the beauty of their own new-found happiness.

"Did you not know it before?" he asked.

"I did not dare to think it."

"What a mask of ice I must wear! How could a man feel as I have done without showing it? Your sister at least knew."

"Ida!"

"It was last night. She began to praise you, I said what I felt, and then in an instant it was all out."

"But what could you—what *could* you see in me? Oh, I do pray that you may not repent it!"

The gentle heart was ruffled amid its joy by the thought of its own unworthiness.

"Repent it! I feel that I am a saved man. You do not know how degrading this City life is,

how debasing, and yet how absorbing. Money for ever clinks in your ear. You can think of nothing else. From the bottom of my heart I hate it, and yet how can I draw back without bringing grief to my dear old father? There was but one way in which I could defy the taint, and that was by having a home influence so pure and so high that it may brace me up against all that draws me down. I have felt that influence already. I know that when I am talking to you I am a better man. It is you who must go with me through life, or I must walk for ever alone."

"Oh, Harold, I am so happy!"

Still they wandered amid the darkening shadows, while one by one the stars peeped out in the blue-black sky above them. At last a chill night-wind blew up from the east, and brought them back to the realities of life.

"You must go in. You will be cold."

"My father will wonder where I am. Shall I say anything to him?"

"If you like, my darling. Or I will in the morning. I must tell my mother to-night. I know how delighted she will be."

"I do hope so."

"Let me take you up the garden path. It is so dark. Your lamp is not lit yet. There is the window. Till to-morrow, then, dearest."

"Till to-morrow, Harold."

"My own darling!" He stooped, and their lips met for the first time. Then, as she pushed open the folding windows she heard his quick firm step as it passed down the gravelled path. A lamp was lit as

she entered the room, and there was Ida, dancing about like a mischievous little fairy in front of her.

"And have you anything to tell me?" she asked,



"He stooped, and their lips met for the first time."

with a solemn face. Then, suddenly throwing her arms around her sister's neck! "Oh, you dear, dear old Clara! I am so pleased! I am so pleased!"

CHAPTER VII.

"Venit Tandem Felicitas."



IT was just three days after the doctor and the admiral had congratulated each other upon the closer tie which was to unite their two families, and to turn their friendship into something even dearer and more intimate, that Miss Ida Walker received a letter which caused her some surprise and considerable amusement. It was dated from next door, and was handed in by the red-headed page after breakfast.

"Dear Miss Ida," began this curious document, and then relapsed suddenly into the third person—"Mr. Charles Westmacott hopes that he may have the extreme pleasure of a ride with Miss Ida Walker upon his tandem-tricycle. Mr. Charles Westmacott will bring it round in half-an-hour. You in front. Yours very truly, CHARLES WESTMACOTT."

The whole was written in a large, loose-jointed, and school-boyish hand, very thin on the up strokes and thick on the down, as though care and pains had gone to the fashioning of it.

Strange as was the form, the meaning was clear enough, so Ida hastened to her room, and had hardly slipped on her light-grey cycling dress when she saw the tandem with its large occupant at the

door. He handed her up to her saddle with a more solemn and thoughtful face than was usual with him, and a few moments later they were flying along the beautiful smooth suburban roads in the direction of Forest Hill. The great limbs of the athlete made the heavy machine spring and quiver with every stroke; while the mignon grey figure with the laughing face, and the golden curls blowing from under the little pink-banded straw hat, simply held firmly to her perch, and let the treadles whirl round beneath her feet. Mile after mile they flew, the wind beating in her face, the trees dancing past in two long ranks on either side, until they had passed round Croydon, and were approaching Norwood once more from the further side.

"Aren't you tired?" she asked, glancing over her shoulder, and turning towards him a little pink ear, a fluffy golden curl, and one blue eye twinkling from the very corner of its lid.

"Not a bit. I am just getting my swing."

"Isn't it wonderful to be so strong? You always remind me of a steam-engine."

"Why a steam-engine?"

"Well, because it is so powerful, and reliable, and unreasoning. Well, I didn't mean that last, you know, but—but—you know what I mean. What is the matter with you?"

"Why?"

"Because you have something on your mind. You have not laughed once."

He broke into a gruesome laugh.

"I am quite jolly," said he.

"Oh, no, you are not. And why did you write me such a dreadfully stiff letter?"

"There now," he cried, "I was sure it was stiff. I said it was absurdly stiff."

"Then why write it?"

"It wasn't my own composition."

"Whose, then? Your aunt's?"

"Oh, no! It was a person of the name of Slattery."

"Goodness! Who is he?"

"I knew it would come out, I felt that it would. You've heard of Slattery, the author?"

"Never."

"He is wonderful at expressing himself. He wrote a book called *The Secret Solved; or, Letter-writing Made Easy*. It gives you models of all sorts of letters."

Ida burst out laughing.

"So you actually copied one."

"It was to invite a young lady to a picnic, but I set to work and soon got it changed so that it would do very well. Slattery seems never to have asked anyone to ride a tandem. But when I had written it, it seemed so dreadfully stiff that I had to put a little beginning and end of my own, which seemed to brighten it up a good deal."

"I thought there was something funny about the beginning and end."

"Did you? Fancy your noticing the difference in style. How quick you are! I am very slow at things like that. I ought to have been a woodman, or gamekeeper, or something. I was made on those lines. But I have found something now."

"What is that, then?"

"Ranching. I have a chum in Texas, and he says it is a rare life. I am to buy a share in his business. It is all in the open air—shooting, and riding, and sport. Would it—would it inconvenience you much, Ida, to come out there with me?"

Ida nearly fell off her perch in her amazement. The only words of which she could think were "My goodness me!" so she said them.

"If it would not upset your plans, or change your arrangements in any way." He had slowed down and let go of the steering handle, so that the great machine crawled aimlessly about from one side of the road to the other. "I know very well that I am not clever, or anything of that sort, but still I would do all I can to make you very happy. Don't you think that in time you might come to like me a little bit?"

Ida gave a cry of fright.

"I won't like you if you run me against a brick wall," said she, as the machine rasped up against the curb. "Do attend to the steering."

"Yes, I will. But tell me, Ida, whether you will come with me."

"Oh, I don't know. It's too absurd! How can we talk about such things when I cannot see you? You speak to the nape of my neck, and then I have to twist my head round to answer."

"I know. That was why I put 'You in front' upon my letter. I thought that it would make it easier. But if you would prefer it I will stop the machine, and then you can sit round and talk about it."

"Good gracious!" cried Ida. "Fancy our sitting face to face on a motionless tricycle in the middle of the road, and all the people looking out of their windows at us!"

"It would look rather funny, wouldn't it? Well, then, suppose that we both get off, and push the tandem along in front of us?"

"Oh, no; this is better than that."

"Or I could carry the thing."

Ida burst out laughing.

"That would be more absurd still."

"Then we will go quietly, and I will look out for the steering. I won't talk about it at all if you would rather not. But I really do love you very much, and you would make me happy if you came to Texas with me; and I think that perhaps after a time I could make you happy too."

"But your aunt?"

"Oh, she would like it very much. I can understand that your father might not like to lose you. I 'm sure I wouldn't either, if I were he. But, after all, America is not very far off now-a-days, and it is not so very wild. We would take a grand piano, and—and—a copy of Browning. And Denver and his wife would come over to see us. We should be quite a family party. It would be jolly."

Ida sat listening to the stumbling words and awkward phrases which were whispered from the back of her, but there was something in Charles Westmacott's clumsiness of speech which was more moving than the words of the most eloquent of pleaders. He paused, he stammered, he caught his breath between the words, and he blurted out in

little blunt phrases all the hopes of his heart. If love had not come to her yet, there was at least pity and sympathy, which are nearly akin to it. Wonder there was also that one so weak and frail as she should shake this strong man so, should have the whole course of his life waiting for her decision. Her left hand was on the cushion at her side. He leaned forward and took it gently in his own. She did not try to draw it back from him.

"May I have it," said he, "for life?"

"Oh, do attend to your steering," said she, smiling round at him; "and don't say any more about this to-day. Please don't!"

"When shall I know, then?"

"Oh, to-night, to-morrow, I don't know. I must ask Clara. Talk about something else."

And they did talk about something else; but her left hand was still enclosed in his, and he knew, without asking again, that all was well.

CHAPTER VIII.

Shadows Before.

MRS. WESTMACOTT'S great meeting for the enfranchisement of woman had passed over, and it had been a triumphant success. All the maids and matrons of the southern suburbs had rallied at her summons. There was an influential platform, with Dr. Balthazar Walker in the chair, and Admiral Hay Denver among his more prominent supporters. One benighted male had come in from the outside darkness and had jeered from the further end of the hall; but he had been called to order by the chair, petrified by indignant glances from the unenfranchised around him, and finally escorted to the door by Charles Westmacott. Fiery resolutions were passed, to be forwarded to a large number of leading statesmen, and the meeting broke up with the conviction that a shrewd blow had been struck for the cause of woman.

But there was one woman at least to whom the meeting and all that was connected with it had brought anything but pleasure. Clara Walker watched with a heavy heart the friendship and close intimacy which had sprung up between her father and the widow. From week to week it had

increased until no day ever passed without their being together. The coming meeting had been the excuse for these continual interviews; but now the meeting was over, and still the doctor would refer every point which rose to the judgment of his neighbour. He would talk, too, to his two daughters of her strength of character, her decisive mind, and of the necessity of their cultivating her acquaintance and following her example, until at last it had become his most common topic of conversation.

All this might have passed as merely the natural pleasure which an elderly man might take in the society of an intelligent and handsome woman; but there were other points which seemed to Clara to give it a deeper meaning. She could not forget that when Charles Westmacott had spoken to her one night, he had alluded to the possibility of his aunt marrying again. He must have known or noticed something before he would speak upon such a subject. And then again Mrs. Westmacott had herself said that she hoped to change her style of living shortly, and take over completely new duties. What could that mean except that she expected to marry? And whom? She seemed to see few friends outside their own little circle. She must have alluded to her father. It was a hateful thought, and yet it must be faced.

One evening the doctor had been rather late at his neighbour's. He used to go into the admiral's after dinner, but now he turned more frequently in the other direction. When he returned, Clara was sitting alone in the drawing-room reading a maga-

zine. She sprang up as he entered, pushed forward his chair, and ran to fetch his slippers.

"You are looking a little pale, dear," he remarked.

"Oh, no, papa! I am very well."

"All well with Harold?"

"Yes. His partner, Mr. Pearson, is still away, and he is doing all the work."

"Well done! He is sure to succeed. Where is Ida?"

"In her room, I think."

"She was with Charles Westmacott on the lawn not very long ago. He seems very fond of her. He is not very bright, but I think he will make her a good husband."

"I am sure of it, papa. He is very manly and reliable."

"Yes, I should think that he is not the sort of man who goes wrong. There is nothing hidden about him. As to his brightness, it really does not matter; for his aunt, Mrs. Westmacott, is very rich—much richer than you would think from her style of living,—and she has made him a handsome provision."

"I am glad of that."

"It is between ourselves. I am her trustee, and so I know something of her arrangements. And when are you going to marry, Clara?"

"Oh, papa, not for some time yet! We have not thought of a date."

"Well, really, I don't know that there is any reason for delay. He has a competence, and it increases yearly. As long as you are quite certain that your mind is made up——"

"Oh, papa!"

"Well, then, I really do not know why there should be any delay. And Ida, too, must be married within the next few months. Now, what I want to know is, what I am to do when my two little companions run away from me?"

He spoke lightly, but his eyes were grave as he looked questioningly at his daughter.

"Dear papa, you shall not be alone. It will be years before Harold and I think of marrying; and when we do, you must come and live with us."

"No, no, dear! I know that you mean what you say; but I have seen something of the world, and I know that such arrangements never answer. There cannot be two masters in a house, and yet at my age my freedom is very necessary to me."

"But you would be completely free."

"No, dear, you cannot be that if you are a guest in another man's house. Can you suggest no other alternative?"

"That we remain with you."

"No, no! That is out of the question. Mrs. Westmacott herself says that a woman's first duty is to marry. Marriage, however, should be an equal partnership, as she points out. I should wish you both to marry; but still I should like a suggestion from you, Clara, as to what *I* should do."

"But there is no hurry, papa. Let us wait; I do not intend to marry yet."

Doctor Walker looked disappointed.

"Well, Clara, if you can suggest nothing, I suppose that I must take the initiative myself," said he.

"Then what do you propose, papa?"

She braced herself as one who sees the blow which is about to fall.

He looked at her and hesitated.

"How like your poor dear mother you are, Clara!" he cried. "As I looked at you then, it was as if she had come back from the grave." He stooped towards her and kissed her. "There, run away to your sister, my dear, and do not trouble yourself about me. Nothing is settled yet, but you will find that all will come right."

Clara went upstairs sad at heart, for she was sure now that what she had feared was indeed about to come to pass, and that her father was going to ask Mrs. Westmacott to be his wife. In her pure and earnest mind her mother's memory was enshrined as that of a saint, and the thought that anyone should take her place seemed a terrible desecration. Even worse, however, did this marriage appear when looked at from the point of view of her father's future. The widow might fascinate him by her knowledge of the world, her dash, her strength, her unconventionality—all these qualities Clara was willing to allow her; but she was convinced that she would be unendurable as a life companion. She had come to an age when habits are not lightly to be changed, nor was she a woman who was at all likely to attempt to change them. How would a sensitive man like her father stand the constant strain of such a wife, a woman who was all decision, with no softness and nothing soothing in her nature? It passed as a mere eccentricity when they heard of her stout-drinking, her cigarette-smoking, her occa-

sional whiffs at a long clay-pipe, her horsewhipping of a drunken servant, and her companionship with the snake Eliza, whom she was in the habit of bearing about in her pocket. All this would become unendurable to her father when his first infatuation was past. For his own sake, then, as well as for her mother's memory, this match must be prevented. And yet how powerless she was to prevent it! What could she do? Could Harold aid her? Perhaps. Or Ida? At least, she would tell her sister, and see what she could suggest.

Ida was in her boudoir, a tiny little tapestried room, as neat and dainty as herself, with low walls hung with Imari plaques, and with pretty little Swiss brackets, bearing blue Kaga ware or the pure white Coalport china. In a low chair, beneath a red-shaded standing-lamp, sat Ida, in a diaphanous evening-dress of *mousseline de soie*, the ruddy light tinging her sweet childlike face, and glowing on her golden curls. She sprang up as her sister entered, and threw her arms around her.

"Dear old Clara! Come and sit down here beside me; I have not had a chat for days. But, oh, what a troubled face! What is it, then?"

She put up her forefinger and smoothed her sister's brow with it.

Clara pulled up a stool, and, sitting down beside her sister, passed her arm round her waist.

"I am so sorry to trouble you, dear Ida," she said; "but I do not know what to do."

"There's nothing the matter with Harold?"

"Oh, no, Ida!"

'Nor with my Charles?"

"No, no!"

Ida gave a sigh of relief.

"You quite frightened me, dear," said she. "You can't think how solemn you look. What is it, then?"

"I believe that papa intends to ask Mrs. Westmacott to marry him."

Ida burst out laughing.

"What can have put such a notion into your head, Clara?"

"It is only too true, Ida. I suspected it before, and he himself almost told me as much with his own lips to-night. I don't think that it is a laughing matter."

"Really, I could not help it. If you had told me that those two dear old ladies opposite, the Misses Williams, were both engaged, you would not have surprised me more. It is really too funny."

"Funny, Ida! Think of anyone taking the place of dear mother."

But her sister was of a more practical and less sentimental nature.

"I am sure," said she, "that dear mother would like papa to do whatever would make him most happy. We shall both be away, and why should papa not please himself?"

"But think how unhappy he will be. You know how quiet he is in his ways, and how even a little thing will upset him. How could he live with a wife who would make his whole life a series of surprises? Fancy what a whirlwind she must be in a house! A man at his age cannot change his ways. I am sure he would be miserable."

Ida's face grew graver, and she pondered over the matter for a few minutes.

"I really think that you are right, as usual," said she at last. "I admire Charlie's aunt very much, you know, and I think that she is a very useful and good person; but I don't think she would do as a wife for poor quiet papa."

"But he will certainly ask her, and I really think that she intends to accept him. Then it would be too late to interfere. We have only a few days at the most; and what can we do? How can we hope to make him change his mind?"

Again Ida pondered.

"He has never tried what it is to live with a strong-minded woman," said she. "If we could only get him to realise it in time. Oh, Clara, I have it; I have it! Such a lovely plan!"

She leaned back in her chair, and burst into a fit of laughter so natural and so hearty that Clara had to forget her troubles and to join in it.

"Oh, it is beautiful!" she gasped at last. "Poor papa! What a time he will have! But it's all for his own good, as he used to say when we had to be punished when we were little. Oh, Clara, I do hope your heart won't fail you!"

"I would do anything to save him, dear."

"That's it; you must steel yourself by that thought."

"But what is your plan?"

"Oh, I am so proud of it! We will tire him for ever of the widow, and of all emancipated women. Let me see, what are Mrs. Westmacott's main ideas? You have listened to her more than I. Women

should attend less to household duties; that is one, is it not?"

"Yes, if they feel they have capabilities for higher things. Then she thinks that every woman who has leisure should take up the study of some branch of science, and that, as far as possible, every woman should qualify herself for some trade or profession, choosing for preference those which have been hitherto monopolised by men. To enter the others would only be to intensify the present competition."

"Quite so. That is glorious!" Her blue eyes were dancing with mischief, and she clapped her hands in her delight. "What else? She thinks that whatever a man can do, a woman should be allowed to do also, does she not?"

"She says so."

"And about dress? The short skirt and the divided skirt are what she believes in."

"Yes."

"We must get in some cloth."

"Why?"

"We must make ourselves a dress each. A brand-new, enfranchised, emancipated dress, dear. Don't you see my plan? We shall act up to all Mrs. Westmacott's views in every respect, and improve them when we can. Then papa will know what it is to live with a woman who claims all her rights. Oh, Clara, it will be splendid!"

Her milder sister sat speechless before so daring a scheme.

"But it would be wrong, Ida!" she cried at last.

"Not a bit. It is to save him."

"I should not dare."

"Oh! yes, you would. Harold will help. Besides, what other plan have you?"

"I have none."

"Then you must take mine."

"Yes; perhaps you are right. Well, we do it for a good motive."

"You will do it?"

"I do not see any other way."

"You dear, good Clara! Now I will show you what you are to do. We must not begin too suddenly; it might excite suspicion."

"What would you do, then?"

"To-morrow we must go to Mrs. Westmacott, and sit at her feet and learn all her views."

"What hypocrites we shall feel!"

"We shall be her newest and most enthusiastic converts. Oh, it will be such fun, Clara! Then we shall make our plans and send for what we want, and begin our new life."

"I do hope that we shall not have to keep it up long. It seems so cruel to dear papa."

"Cruel! To save him!"

"I wish I was sure that we were doing right. And yet, what else can we do? Well then, Ida, the die is cast, and we will call upon Mrs. Westmacott to-morrow."

CHAPTER IX.

A Family Plot.



LITTLE did poor Doctor Walker imagine, as he sat at his breakfast-table next morning, that the two sweet girls who sat on either side of him were deep in a conspiracy, and that he, munching innocently at his muffins, was the victim against whom their wiles were planned. Patiently they waited, until at last their opening came.

"It is a beautiful day," he remarked. "It will do for Mrs. Westmacott; she was thinking of having a spin upon her tricycle."

"Then we must call early. We both intended to see her after breakfast."

"Oh, indeed!"

The doctor looked pleased.

"You know, pa," said Ida, "it seems to us that we really have a very great advantage in having Mrs. Westmacott living so near."

"Why so, dear?"

"Well, because she is so advanced, you know. If we only study her ways, we may advance ourselves also."

"I think I have heard you say, papa," remarked Clara, "that she is the type of the woman of the future."

"I am very pleased to hear you speak so sensibly, my dears. I certainly think that she is a woman whom you may very well take as your model. The more intimate you are with her, the better pleased I shall be."

"Then that is settled," said Clara, demurely; and the talk drifted to other matters.

All the morning the two girls sat extracting from Mrs. Westmacott her most extreme views as to the duty of the one sex and the tyranny of the other. Absolute equality, even in details, was her ideal. Enough of the parrot cry of unwomanly and unmaidenly; it had been invented by man to scare woman away when she poached too nearly upon his precious preserves. Every woman should be independent; every woman should learn a trade. It was their duty to push in where they were least welcome. Then they were martyrs to the cause, and pioneers to their weaker sisters. Why should the wash-tub, the needle, and the housekeeper's book be eternally theirs? Might they not reach higher—to the consulting-room, to the bench, and even to the pulpit? Mrs. Westmacott sacrificed her tricycle-ride in her eagerness over her pet subject, and her two fair disciples drank in every word, and noted every suggestion for future use. That afternoon they went shopping in London, and before evening strange packages began to be handed in at the doctor's door. The plot was ripe for execution, and one of the conspirators was merry

and jubilant, while the other was very nervous and troubled.

When the doctor came down to the dining-room next morning, he was surprised to find that his daughters had already been up some time. Ida was installed at one end of the table, with a spirit-lamp, a curved glass flask, and several bottles in front of her. The contents of the flask were boiling furiously, while a villainous smell filled the room. Clara lounged in an arm-chair, with her feet upon a second one, a blue-covered book in her hand, and a huge map of the British Islands spread across her lap.

"Hullo!" cried the doctor, blinking and sniffing, "where's the breakfast?"

"Oh, didn't you order it?" asked Ida.

"I! No; why should I?" He rang the bell. "Why have you not laid the breakfast, Jane?"

"If you please, sir, Miss Ida was aworkin' at the table."

"Oh, of course, Jane," said the young lady, calmly. "I am so sorry. I shall be ready to move in a few minutes."

"But what on earth are you doing, Ida?" asked the doctor. "The smell is most offensive; and, good gracious, look at the mess which you have made upon the cloth! Why, you have burned a hole right through."

"Oh, that is the acid," Ida answered, contentedly. "Mrs. Westmacott said that it would burn holes."

"You might have taken her word for it without trying," said her father, drily.

"But, look here, pa. See what the book says:

'The scientific mind takes nothing upon trust. Prove all things!' I have proved that."

"You certainly have. Well, until breakfast is ready I'll glance over *The Times*. Have you seen it?"

"*The Times?* Oh, dear me! this is it which I have under my spirit-lamp. I am afraid there is some acid upon that too, and it is rather damp and torn. Here it is."

The doctor took the bedraggled paper with a rueful face.

"Everything seems to be wrong to-day," he remarked. "What is this sudden enthusiasm about chemistry, Ida?"

"Oh, I am trying to live up to Mrs. Westmacott's teaching."

"Quite right! quite right!" said he, though perhaps with less heartiness than he had shown the day before. "Ah, here is breakfast at last!"

But nothing was comfortable that morning; there were eggs without egg-spoons, toast which was leathery from being kept, dried-up rashers, and grounds in the coffee. Above all, there was that dreadful smell, which pervaded everything and gave a horrible twang to every mouthful.

"I don't wish to put a damper upon your studies, Ida," said the doctor, as he pushed back his chair; "but I do think it would be better if you did your chemical experiments a little later in the day."

"But Mrs. Westmacott says that women should rise early, and do their work before breakfast."

"Then they should choose some other room besides the breakfast-room."

The doctor was becoming just a little ruffled. A turn in the open air would soothe him, he thought.

"Where are my boots?" he asked.

But they were not in their accustomed corner by his chair. Up and down he searched, while the three servants took up the quest, stooping and peeping under bookcases and drawers. Ida had returned to her studies, and Clara to her blue-covered volume, sitting absorbed and disinterested amid the bustle and the racket. At last a general buzz of congratulation announced that the cook had discovered the boots hung up among the hats in the hall. The doctor, very red and flustered, drew them on, and stamped off to join the admiral in his morning walk.

As the door slammed Ida burst into a shout of laughter.

"You see, Clara," she cried, "the charm works already! He has gone to number one instead of to number three. Oh, we shall win a great victory! You've been very good, dear; I could see that you were on thorns to help him when he was looking for his boots."

"Poor papa! It is so cruel. And yet what are we to do?"

"Oh, he will enjoy being comfortable all the more if we give him a little discomfort now. What horrible work this chemistry is! Look at my frock! It is ruined. And this dreadful smell!"

She threw open the window, and thrust her little golden-curled head out of it. Charles Westmacott was hoeing at the other side of the garden fence.

"Good-morning, sir," said Ida.

"Good-morning!"

The big man leaned upon his hoe, and looked up at her.

"Have you any cigarettes, Charles?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Throw me up two."

"Here is my case. Can you catch?"

A sealskin case came with a soft thud on to the floor. Ida opened it. It was full.

"What are these?" she asked.

"Egyptians."

"What are some other brands?"

"Oh, Richmond Gems, and Turkish, and Cambridge. But why?"

"Never mind!"

She nodded to him and closed the window.

"We must remember all those, Clara," said she. "We must learn to talk about such things. Mrs. Westmacott knows all about the brands of cigarettes. Has your rum come?"

"Yes, dear. It is here."

"And I have my stout. Come along up to my room now. This smell is too abominable. But we must be ready for him when he comes back. If we sit at the window we shall see him coming down the road."

The fresh morning air, and the genial company of the admiral, had caused the doctor to forget his troubles, and he came back about mid-day in an excellent humour. As he opened the hall door the vile smell of chemicals which had spoilt his breakfast met him with a redoubled virulence. He threw open the hall window, entered the dining-room, and stood aghast at the sight which met his eyes.

Ida was still sitting among her bottles with a lit cigarette in her left hand, and a glass of stout on the table beside her. Clara with another cigarette was lounging in the easy-chair with several maps spread out upon the floor around. Her feet were stuck up on the coalscuttle, and she had a tumblerful of some reddish-brown composition on the smoking-table close at her elbow. The doctor gazed from one to the other of them through the thin grey haze of smoke, but his eyes rested finally in a settled stare of astonishment upon his elder and more serious daughter.

"Clara!" he gasped, "I could not have believed it!"

"What is it, papa?"

"You are smoking!"

"Trying to, papa. I find it a little difficult, for I have not been used to it."

"But why, in the name of goodness——"

"Mrs. Westmacott recommends it."

"Oh, a lady of mature years may do many things which a young girl must avoid."

"Oh, no!" cried Ida. "Mrs. Westmacott says that there should be one law for all. Have a cigarette, pa?"

"No, thank you. I never smoke in the morning."

"No? Perhaps you don't care for the brand. What are these, Clara?"

"Egyptians."

"Ah! we must have some Richmond Gems or Turkish. I wish, pa, when you go into town, you would get me some Turkish."

"I will do nothing of the kind. I do not at all

think that it is a fitting habit for young ladies. I do not agree with Mrs. Westmacott upon the point."

"Really, pa! It was you who advised us to imitate her."

"But with discrimination. What is it that you are drinking, Clara?"

"Rum, papa."

"Rum? In the morning?" He sat down and



"Clara," he gasped, "I could not have believed it."

rubbed his eyes as one who tries to skake off some evil dream. "Did you say rum?"

"Yes, 'pa. They all drink it in the profession which I am going to take up."

"Profession, Clara?"

"Mrs. Westmacott says that every woman should

follow a calling, and that we ought to choose those which women have always avoided."

"Quite so."

"Well, I am going to act upon her advice. I am going to be a pilot."

"My dear Clara! A pilot! This is too much."

"This is a beautiful book, papa. *The Lights, Beacons, Buoys, Channels, and Landmarks of Great Britain.* Here is another, *The Master Mariner's Hand-book.* You can't imagine how interesting it is."

"You are joking, Clara. You must be joking."

"Not at all, pa. You can't think what a lot I have learned already. I'm to carry a green light to starboard, and a red to port, with a white light at the masthead, and a flare-up every fifteen minutes."

"Oh, won't it look pretty at night!" cried her sister.

"And I know the fog-signals. One blast means that a ship steers to starboard, two to port, three astern, four that it is unmanageable. But this man asks such dreadful questions at the end of each chapter. Listen to this: 'You see a red light. The ship is on the port tack, and the wind at north; what course is that ship steering to a point?'"

The doctor rose with a gesture of despair.

"I can't imagine what has come over you both," said he.

"My dear papa, we are trying hard to live up to Mrs. Westmacott's standard."

"Well, I must say that I do not admire the result. Your chemistry, Ida, may perhaps do no harm; but your scheme, Clara, is out of the question. How a girl of your sense could ever entertain such a notion

is more than I can imagine. But I must absolutely forbid you to go further with it."

"But, pa," asked Ida, with an air of innocent inquiry in her big blue eyes, "what are we to do when your commands and Mrs. Westmacott's advice are opposed? You told us to obey her. She says that when women try to throw off their shackles, their fathers, brothers, and husbands are the very first to try to rivet them on again, and that in such a matter no man has any authority."

"Does Mrs. Westmacott teach you that I am not the head of my own house?"

The doctor flushed, and his grizzled hair bristled in his anger.

"Certainly. She says that all heads of houses are relics of the dark ages."

The doctor muttered something, and stamped his foot upon the carpet. Then, without a word, he passed out into the garden, and his daughters could see him striding furiously up and down, cutting off the heads of the flowers with a switch.

"Oh, you darling! You played your part so splendidly!" cried Ida.

"But how cruel it is! When I saw the sorrow and surprise in his eyes, I very nearly put my arms about him and told him all. Don't you think we have done enough?"

"No, no, no! Not nearly enough. You must not turn weak now, Clara. It is so funny that I should be leading you. It is quite a new experience. But I know that I am right. If we go on as we are doing, we shall be able to say all our lives that we have saved him. And if we don't, oh! Clara, we should never forgive ourselves."

CHAPTER X.

Women of the Future.



FROM that day the doctor's peace was gone. Never was a quiet and orderly household transformed so suddenly into a bear-garden, or a happy man turned into such a completely miserable one. He had never realised before how entirely his daughters had shielded him from all the friction of life. Now that they had not only ceased to protect him, but had themselves become a source of trouble to him, he began to understand how great the blessing was which he had enjoyed, and to sigh for the happy days before his girls had come under the influence of his neighbour.

"You don't look happy," Mrs. Westmacott had remarked to him one morning. "You are pale and a little off colour. You should come with me for a ten-mile spin upon the tandem."

"I am troubled about my girls."

They were walking up and down in the garden. From time to time there sounded from the house behind them the long sad wail of a French horn.

"That is Ida," said he. "She has taken to practising on that dreadful instrument in the inter-

vals of her chemistry. And Clara is quite as bad. I declare it is getting quite unendurable."

"Ah, doctor, doctor!" she cried, shaking her forefinger with a gleam of her white teeth. "You must live up to your principles—you must give your daughters the same liberty as you advocate for other women."

"Liberty, madam, certainly! But this approaches to license."

"The same law for all, my friend." She tapped him reprovingly on the arm with her sunshade. "When you were twenty, your father did not, I presume, object to your learning chemistry or playing a musical instrument. You would have thought it tyranny if he had."

"But there is such a sudden change in them both."

"Yes, I have noticed that they have been very enthusiastic lately in the cause of liberty. Of all my disciples I think that they promise to be the most devoted and consistent, which is the more natural since their father is one of our most trusted champions."

The doctor gave a twitch of impatience.

"I seem to have lost all authority!" he cried.

"No, no, my dear friend. They are a little exuberant at having broken the trammels of custom. That is all."

"You cannot think what I have had to put up with, madam. It has been a dreadful experience. Last night, after I had extinguished the candle in my bedroom, I placed my foot upon something smooth and hard, which scuttled from under me. Imagine

my horror! I lit the gas, and came upon a well-grown tortoise, which Clara had thought fit to introduce into the house. I call it a filthy custom to have such pets."

Mrs. Westmacott dropped him a little courtsey.

"Thank you, sir," said she. "That is a nice little side hit at my poor Eliza."

"I give you my word that I had forgotten about her," cried the doctor, flushing. "One such pet may no doubt be endured, but two are more than I can bear. Ida has a monkey, which lives on the curtain-rod. It is a most dreadful creature. It will remain absolutely motionless until it sees that you have forgotten its presence, and then it will suddenly bound from picture to picture all round the walls, and end by swinging down on the bell-rope and jumping on to the top of your head. At breakfast it stole a poached egg, and daubed it all over the door-handle. Ida calls these outrages amusing tricks!"

"Oh, all will come right," said the widow, reassuringly.

"And Clara is as bad,—Clara, who used to be so good and sweet, the very image of her poor mother! She insists upon this preposterous scheme of being a pilot, and will talk of nothing but revolving lights and hidden rocks, and codes of signals, and nonsense of the kind."

"But why preposterous?" asked his companion. "What nobler occupation can there be than that of stimulating commerce and aiding the mariner to steer safely into port? I should think your daughter admirably adapted for such duties."

"Then I must beg to differ from you, madam."

"Still, you are inconsistent."

"Excuse me, madam, I do not see the matter in the same light. And I should be obliged to you if you would use your influence with my daughter to dissuade her."

"You wish to make me inconsistent too."

"Then you refuse?"

"I am afraid that I cannot interfere."

The doctor was very angry.

"Very well, madam," said he. "In that case I can only say that I have the honour to wish you a very good-morning."

He raised his broad straw hat and strode away up the gravel path, while the widow looked after him with twinkling eyes. She was surprised herself to find that she liked the doctor better the more masculine and aggressive he became. It was unreasonable, and against all principle; and yet so it was, and no argument could mend the matter.

Very hot and angry the doctor retired into his room, and sat down to read his paper. Ida had retired, and the distant wails of her bugle showed that she was upstairs in her boudoir. Clara sat opposite to him with her exasperating charts and her blue book. The doctor glanced at her, and his eyes remained fixed in astonishment upon the front of her skirt.

"My dear Clara," he cried, "you have torn your skirt!"

His daughter laughed, and smoothed out her frock. To his horror, he saw the red plush of the chair where the dress ought to have been.

"It is all torn!" he cried. "What have you done?"

"My dear papa!" said she, "what do you know about the mysteries of ladies' dress? This is a divided skirt."

Then he saw that it was indeed so arranged, and that his daughter was clad in a sort of loose extremely long knickerbockers.

"It will be so convenient for my sea-boots," she explained.

Her father shook his head sadly.

"Your dear mother would not have liked it, Clara," said he.

For a moment the conspiracy was upon the point of collapsing. There was something in the gentleness of his rebuke, and in his appeal to her mother, which brought the tears to her eyes, and in another instant she would have been kneeling beside him with everything confessed, when the door flew open, and her sister Ida came bounding into the room. She wore a short grey skirt, like that of Mrs. Westmacott, and she held it up in each hand and danced about among the furniture.

"I feel quite the Gaiety girl!" she cried. "How delicious it must be to be upon the stage! You can't think how nice this dress is, papa. One feels so free in it. And isn't Clara charming?"

"Go to your room this instant, and take it off!" thundered the doctor. "I call it highly improper, and no daughter of mine shall wear it."

"Papa! Improper! Why it is the exact model of Mrs. Westmacott's."

"I say it is improper. And yours also, Clara! Your conduct is really outrageous. You drive me out of the house. I am going to my club in town.

I have no comfort or peace of mind in my own house. I will stand it no longer. I may be late to-night—I shall go to the British Medical meeting. But when I return I shall hope to find that you have reconsidered your conduct, and that you have skaken yourself clear of the pernicious influences which have recently made such an alteration in your conduct."

He seized his hat, slammed the dining-room door, and a few minutes later they heard the crash of the big front gate.

"Victory, Clara, Victory!" cried Ida, still pirouetting around the furniture. "Did you hear what he said? Pernicious influences! Don't you understand, Clara? Why do you sit there so pale and glum? Why don't you get up and dance?"

"Oh! I shall be so glad when it is over, Ida. I do hate to give him pain. Surely he has learned now that it is very unpleasant to spend one's life with reformers!"

"He has almost learned it, Clara. Just one more little lesson. We must not risk all at this last moment."

"What would you do, Ida? Oh, don't do anything too dreadful! I feel that we have gone too far already."

"Oh, we can do it very nicely. You see, we are both engaged, and that makes it very easy. Harold will do what you ask him, especially as you have told him the reason why; and my Charles will do it without even wanting to know the reason. Now you know what Mrs. Westmacott thinks about the reserve of young ladies. Mere prudery, affectation,

and a relic of the dark ages of the Zenana. Those were her words, were they not?"

"What then?"

"Well, now we must put it in practice. We are reducing all her other views to practice, and we must not shirk this one."

"But what would you do? Oh, don't look so wicked, Ida! You look like some evil little fairy, with your golden hair and dancing mischievous eyes. I know that you are going to propose something dreadful!"

"We must give a little supper to-night."

"We? A supper!"

"Why not? Young gentlemen give suppers. Why not young ladies?"

"But whom shall we invite?"

"Why, Harold and Charles, of course."

"And the admiral and Mrs. Hay Denver?"

"Oh, no! That would be very old-fashioned. We must keep up with the times, Clara."

"But what can we give them for supper?"

"Oh, something with a nice, fast, rollicking, late-at-night kind of flavour to it! Let me see! Champagne, of course—and oysters. Oysters will do. In the novels, all the naughty people take champagne and oysters. Besides, they won't need any cooking. How is your pocket-money, Clara?"

"I have three pounds."

"And I have one. Four pounds. I have no idea how much champagne costs. Have you?"

"Not the slightest."

"How many oysters does a man eat?"

"I can't imagine."

"I'll write and ask Charles. No, I won't; I'll ask Jane. Ring for her, Clara. She has been a cook, and is sure to know."

Jane, on being cross-questioned, refused to commit herself beyond the statement that it depended upon the gentleman, and also upon the oysters. The united experience of the kitchen, however, testified that three dozen was a fair provision.

"Then we shall have eight dozen altogether," said Ida, jotting down all her requirements upon a sheet of paper. "And two pints of champagne. And some brown bread, and vinegar, and pepper. That's all, I think. It is not so very difficult to give a supper after all, is it, Clara?"

"I don't like it, Ida. It seems to me to be so very indelicate."

"But it is needed to clinch the matter. No, no, there is no drawing back now, Clara, or we shall ruin everything. Papa is sure to come back by the 9.45. He will reach the door at ten. We must have everything ready for him. Now, just sit down at once and ask Harold to come at nine o'clock, and I shall do the same to Charles."

The two invitations were despatched, received and accepted. Harold was already a confidant, and he understood that this was some further development of the plot. As to Charles, he was so accustomed to feminine eccentricity in the person of his aunt, that the only thing which could surprise him would be a rigid observance of etiquette. At nine o'clock they entered the dining-room of No. 2, to find the master of the house absent, a red-shaded lamp, a snowy cloth, a pleasant little feast, and the

two whom they would have chosen as their companions. A merrier party never met, and the house rang with their laughter and their chatter.

"It is three minutes to ten!" cried Clara, suddenly, glancing at the clock.

"Good gracious! so it is. Now for our little tableau!"

Ida pushed the champagne bottles obtrusively forward in the direction of the door, and scattered oyster-shells over the cloth.

"Have you your pipe, Charles?"

"My pipe! Yes."

"Then please smoke it. Now, don't argue about it, but do it; for you will ruin the effect otherwise."

The large man drew out a red case and extracted a great yellow meerschaum, out of which, a moment later, he was puffing thick wreaths of smoke. Harold had lit a cigar, and both the girls had cigarettes.

"That looks very nice and emancipated!" said Ida, glancing round. "Now I shall lie on this sofa. So! Now, Charles, just sit here, and throw your arm carelessly over the back of the sofa. No, don't stop smoking; I like it. Clara, dear, put your feet upon the coal-scuttle, and do try to look a little dissipated. I wish we could crown ourselves with flowers. There are some lettuces on the sideboard. Oh dear, here he is! I hear his key!"

She began to sing, in her high fresh voice, a little snatch from a French song, with a swinging tra-la-la chorus.

The doctor had walked home from the station in a peaceable and relenting frame of mind, feeling

that perhaps he had said too much in the morning, that his daughters had for years been models in every way, and that, if there had been any change of late, it was, as they said themselves, on account of their anxiety to follow his advice and to imitate Mrs. Westmacott. He could see clearly enough now that that advice was unwise, and that a world peopled with Mrs. Westmacotts would not be a happy or a soothing one. It was he who was himself to blame, and he was grieved by the thought that perhaps his hot words had troubled and saddened his two girls.

This fear, however, was soon dissipated. As he entered his hall he heard the voice of Ida uplifted in a rollicking ditty, and a very strong smell of tobacco was borne to his nostrils. He threw open the dining-room door and stood aghast at the scene which met his eyes.

The room was full of the blue wreaths of smoke, and the lamplight shone through the thin haze upon gold-topped bottles, plates, napkins, and a litter of oyster-shells and cigarettes. Ida, flushed and excited, was reclining upon the settee, a wine-glass at her elbow and a cigarette between her fingers; while Charles Westmacott sat beside her, with his arm thrown over the head of the sofa with the suggestion of a caress. On the other side of the room, Clara was lounging in an arm-chair, with Harold beside her, both smoking, and both with wine-glasses beside them. The doctor stood speechless in the doorway, staring at the Bacchanalian scene.

"Come in, papa! Do!" cried Ida. "Won't you have a glass of champagne?"

"Pray excuse me," said her father, coldly; "I feel that I am intruding. I did not know that you were entertaining. Perhaps you will kindly let me know when you have finished. You will find me in my study."

He ignored the two young men completely, and, closing the door, retired, deeply hurt and mortified, to his room. A quarter of an hour afterwards he heard the door slam, and his two daughters came to announce that the guests were gone.

"Guests! Whose guests?" he cried angrily. "What is the meaning of this exhibition?"

"We have been giving a little supper, papa. They were our guests."

"Oh, indeed!" The doctor laughed sarcastically. "You think it right, then, to entertain young bachelors late at night, to smoke and drink with them, to—— Oh, that I should ever have lived to blush for my own daughters! I thank God that your dear mother never saw the day!"

"Dearest papa," cried Clara, throwing her arms about him, "do not be angry with us. If you understood all, you would see that there is no harm in it."

"No harm, miss! Who is the best judge of that?"

"Mrs. Westmacott," suggested Ida, slyly.

The doctor sprang from his chair.

"Confound Mrs. Westmacott!" he cried, striking frenziedly into the air with his hands. "Am I to hear of nothing but this woman? Is she to confront me at every turn? I will endure it no longer!"

"But it was your wish, papa."

"Then I will tell you now what my second and wiser wish is, and then we shall see if you will obey it as you have the first."

"Of course we will, papa."

"Then my wish is, that you should forget these odious notions which you have imbibed, that you should dress and act as you used to do before ever you saw this woman, and that, in future, you confine your intercourse with her to such civilities as are necessary between neighbours."

"We are to give up Mrs. Westmacott?"

"Or give up me."

"Oh! dear dad, how can you say anything so cruel?" cried Ida, burrowing her towsy, golden hair into her father's shirt-front, while Clara pressed her cheek against his whisker. "Of course we shall give her up, if you prefer it."

"Of course we shall, papa."

The doctor patted the two caressing heads.

"These are my own two girls again!" he cried. "It has been my fault as much as yours. I have been astray, and you have followed me in my error. It was only by seeing your mistake that I have become conscious of my own. Let us set it aside, and neither say nor think anything more about it."

CHAPTER XI.

A Bolt from the Blue.



SO, by the cleverness of two girls, a dark cloud was thinned away and turned into sunshine. Over one of them, alas! another cloud was gathering, which could not be so easily dispersed. Of these three households which Fate had thrown together, two had already been united by ties of love. It was destined, however, that a bond of another sort should connect the Westmacotts with the Hay Denvers.

Between the admiral and the widow a very cordial feeling had existed since the day when the old seaman had hauled down his flag and changed his opinions; granting to the yachtswoman all that he had refused to the reformer. His own frank and downright nature respected the same qualities in his neighbour, and a friendship sprang up between them which was more like that which exists between two men, founded upon esteem and a community of tastes.

"By the way, admiral," said Mrs. Westmacott one morning, as they walked together down to the station, "I understand that this boy of yours, in the intervals of paying his devotions to Miss Walker, is doing something upon 'Change."

"Yes, ma'am; and there is no man of his age

who is doing so well. He's drawing ahead, I can tell you, ma'am. Some of those that started with him are hull down astarn now. He touched his five hundred last year, and before he's thirty he'll be making the four figures."

"The reason I asked is, that I have small investments to make myself from time to time, and my present broker is a rascal. I should be very glad to do it through your son."

"It is very kind of you, ma'am. His partner is away on a holiday, and Harold would like to push on a bit and show what he can do. You know the poop isn't big enough to hold the lieutenant when the skipper's on shore."

"I suppose he charges the usual half per cent.?"

"Don't know, I'm sure, ma'am. I'll swear that he does what is right and proper."

"That is what I usually pay—ten shillings in the hundred pounds. If you see him before I do, just ask him to get me five thousand in New Zealands. It is at four just now, and I fancy it may rise."

"Five thousand!" exclaimed the admiral, reckoning it in his own mind. "Lemme see! That's twenty-five pounds commission. A nice day's work, upon my word. It is a very handsome order, ma'am!"

"Well, I must pay someone, and why not him?"

"I'll tell him, and I'm sure he'll lose no time."

"Oh, there's no great hurry. By the way, I understand from what you said just now that he has a partner?"

"Yes, my boy is the junior partner. Pearson is

the senior. I was introduced to him years ago, and he offered Harold the opening. Of course we had a pretty stiff premium to pay."

Mrs. Westmacott had stopped, and was standing very stiffly, with her Red Indian face even grimmer than usual.

"Pearson?" said she. "Jeremiah Pearson?"

"The same."

"Then it's all off!" she cried. "You need not carry out that investment."

"Very well, ma'am."

They walked on together side by side, she brooding over some thought of her own, and he a little crossed and disappointed at her caprice and the lost commission for Harold.

"I'll tell you what, admiral," she exclaimed suddenly, "if I were you, I should get your boy out of this partnership."

"But why, madam?"

"Because he is tied to one of the deepest, slyest foxes in the whole city of London."

"Jeremiah Pearson, ma'am! What can you know of him? He bears a good name."

"No one in this world knows Jeremiah Pearson as I know him, admiral. I warn you, because I have a friendly feeling both for you and for your son. The man is a rogue, and you had best avoid him."

"But these are only words, ma'am. Do you tell me that you know him better than the brokers and jobbers in the City?"

"Man," cried Mrs. Westmacott, "will you allow that I know him, when I tell you that my maiden

name was Ada Pearson, and that Jeremiah is my only brother?"

The admiral whistled.

"Whew!" cried he. "Now that I think of it, there is a likeness."

"He is a man of iron, admiral—a man without a heart. I should shock you if I were to tell you what I have endured from my brother. My father's wealth was divided equally between us. His own share he ran through in five years, and he has tried since then by every trick of a cunning, low-minded man, by base cajolery, by legal quibbles, by brutal intimidation, to juggle me out of my share as well. There is no villainy of which the man is not capable. Oh, I know my brother Jeremiah! I know him, and I am prepared for him!"

"This is all new to me, ma'am. 'Pon my word, I hardly know what to say to it. I thank you for having spoken so plainly. From what you say, this is a poor sort of consort for a man to sail with. Perhaps Harold would do well to cut himself adrift."

"Without losing a day."

"Well, we shall talk it over. You may be sure of that. But here we are at the station, so I will just see you into your carriage, and then home to see what my wife says to the matter."

As he trudged homewards, thoughtful and perplexed, he was surprised to hear a shout behind him, and to see Harold running down the road after him.

"Why, dad," he cried, "I have just come from town, and the first thing I saw was your back as you marched away. But you are such a quick walker that I had to run to catch you."

The admiral's smile of pleasure had broken his stern face into a thousand wrinkles.

"You are early to-day," said he.

"Yes, I wanted to consult you."

"Nothing wrong?"

"Oh no, only an inconvenience."

"What is it then?"

"How much have we in our private account?"

"Pretty fair. Some eight hundred, I think."

"Oh, half that will be ample. It was rather thoughtless of Pearson."

"What, then?"

"Well, you see, dad, when he went away upon this little holiday to Havre he left me to pay accounts and so on. He told me that there was enough at the bank for all claims. I had occasion on Tuesday to pay away two cheque, one for £80 and the other for £120, and here they are returned, with a bank notice that we have already overdrawn to the extent of some hundreds."

The admiral looked very grave.

"What's the meaning of that, then?" he asked.

"Oh, it can easily be set right. You see, Pearson invests all the spare capital, and keeps as small a margin as possible in the bank. Still, it was too bad of him to allow me even to run a risk of having a cheque returned. I have written to him and demanded his authority to sell out some stock, and I have written an explanation to these people. In the meantime, however, I have had to issue several other cheques, so I had better transfer part of our private account to meet them."

"Quite so, my boy. All that's mine is yours.

But who do you think this Pearson is? He is Mrs. Westmacott's brother."

"Really? What a singular thing! Well, I can see a likeness, now that you mention it. They have both the same hard type of face."

"She has been warning me against him—says he is the rankest pirate in London. I hope that it is all right, boy, and that we may not find ourselves in broken water."

Harold had turned a little pale as he heard Mrs. Westmacott's opinion of his senior partner. It gave shape and substance to certain vague fears and suspicions of his own, which had been pushed back as often as they obtruded themselves, as being too monstrous and fantastic for belief.

"He is a well-known man in the City, dad," said he.

"Of course he is—of course he is. That is what I told her. They would have found him out there, if anything had been amiss with him. Bless you, there's nothing so bitter as a family quarrel. Still, it is just as well that you have written about this affair, for we may as well have all fair and above board."

But Harold's letter to his partner was crossed by a letter from his partner to Harold. It lay awaiting him upon the breakfast-table next morning, and it sent the heart into his mouth as he read it, and caused him to spring up from his chair with a white face and staring eyes.

"My boy! My boy!"

"I am ruined, mother!—ruined!"

He stood gazing wildly in front of him, while the

sheet of paper fluttered down on to the carpet. Then he dropped back into the chair and sank his face in his hands. His mother had her arms round him in an instant, while the admiral, with shaking fingers, picked up the letter from the floor and adjusted his glasses to read it.

"My dear Denver," it ran,—"By the time that this reaches you I shall be out of the reach of yourself or of anyone else who may desire an interview. You need not search for me, for I assure you that this letter is posted by a friend, and that you will have your trouble in vain if your try to find me. I am sorry to leave you in such a tight place, but one or other of us must be squeezed, and, on the whole, I prefer that it should be you. You'll find nothing in the bank, and about £13,000 unaccounted for. I'm not sure that the best thing you can do is not to realise what you can, and imitate your senior's example. If you act at once, you may get clean away. If not, it's not only that you must put up your shutters, but I am afraid that this missing money could hardly be included as an ordinary debt; and of course you are legally responsible for it, just as much as I am. Take a friend's advice, and get to America. A young man with brains can always do something out there, and you can live down this little mischance. It will be a cheap lesson if it teaches you to take nothing upon trust in business, and to insist upon knowing exactly what your partner is doing, however senior he may be to you.

"Yours faithfully,

"JEREMIAH PEARSON."

"Great heavens!" groaned the admiral, "he has absconded!"

"And left me both a bankrupt and a thief!"

"No, no, Harold!" sobbed his mother. "All will be right. What matter about money?"



"I am ruined, mother—ruined!"

"Money, mother! It is my honour!"

"The boy is right. It is his honour, and my honour; for his is mine. This is a sore trouble,

mother, when we thought our life's troubles were all behind us, but we will bear it as we have borne others."

He held out his stringy hand, and the two old folk sat with bowed grey heads, their fingers intertwined, strong in each other's love and sympathy.

"We were too happy!" she sighed.

"But it is God's will, mother."

"Yes, John; it is God's will."

"And yet it is bitter to bear. I could have lost all—the house, money, rank—I could have borne it. But at my age—my honour—the honour of an admiral of the fleet!"

"No honour can be lost, John, where no dishonour has been done. What have you done? What has Harold done? There is no question of honour."

The old man shook his head; but Harold had already called together his clear practical sense, which for an instant in the presence of this frightful blow had deserted him.

"The mater is right, dad," said he. "It is bad enough, Heaven knows; but we must not take too dark a view of it. After all, this insolent letter is in itself evidence that I had nothing to do with the schemes of the base villain who wrote it."

"They may think it pre-arranged."

"They could not. My whole life cries out against the thought. They could not look me in the face and entertain it."

"No, boy, not if they have eyes in their heads," cried the admiral, plucking up courage at the sight of the flashing eyes and brave defiant face. "We

have the letter, and we have your character. We'll weather it yet between them. It's my fault from the beginning for choosing such a land-shark for your consort. God help me! I thought I was finding such an opening for you."

"Dear dad! how could you possibly know? As he says in his letter, it has given me a lesson. But he was so much older and so much more experienced, that it was hard for me to ask to examine his books. But we must waste no time. I must go to the City."

"What will you do?"

"What an honest man should do. I will write to all our clients and creditors, assemble them, lay the whole matter before them, read them the letter, and put myself absolutely in their hands."

"That's it, boy—yard-arm to yard-arm, and have it over."

"I must go at once." He put on his top-coat and his hat. "But I have ten minutes yet before I can catch a train. There is one little thing which I must do before I start."

He had caught sight through the long glass folding-doors of the gleam of a white blouse and a straw hat in the tennis-ground. Clara used often to meet him there of a morning to say a few words before he hurried away into the City. He walked out now with the quick firm step of a man who has taken a momentous resolution, but his face was haggard and his lips pale.

"Clara," said he, as she came towards him with words of greeting, "I am sorry to bring ill-news to you; but things have gone wrong in the City, and—

and I think that I ought to release you from your engagement."

Clara stared at him with her great questioning dark eyes, and her face became as pale as his.

"How can the City affect you and me, Harold?"

"It is dishonour. I cannot ask you to share it."

"Dishonour! The loss of some miserable gold and silver coins!"

"Oh, Clara, if it were only that! We could be far happier together in a little cottage in the country than with all the riches of the City. Poverty could not cut me to the heart as I have been cut this morning. Why, it is but twenty minutes since I had the letter, Clara, and it seems to me to be some old, old thing which happened far away in my past life, some horrid black cloud which shut out all the freshness and the peace from it."

"But what is it, then? What do you fear worse than poverty?"

"To have debts that I cannot meet. To be hammered upon 'Change, and declared a bankrupt. To know that others have a just claim upon me, and to feel that I dare not meet their eyes. Is not that worse than poverty?"

"Yes, Harold, a thousandfold worse. But all this may be got over. Is there nothing more?"

"My partner has fled, and left me responsible for heavy debts, and in such a position that I may be required by the law to produce some, at least, of this missing money. It has been confided to him to invest, and he has embezzled it. I, as his partner, am liable for it. I have brought misery on all whom

I love—my father, my mother. But you, at least, shall not be under the shadow. You are free, Clara. There is no tie between us."

"It takes two to make such a tie, Harold," said she, smiling, and putting her hand inside his arm. "It takes two to make it, dear, and also two to break it. Is that the way they do business in the City, sir, that a man can always, at his own sweet will, tear up his engagements?"

"You hold me to it, Clara?"

"No creditor so remorseless as I, Harold. Never, never shall you get from that bond."

"But I am ruined! My whole life is blasted!"

"And so you wish to ruin me, and blast my life also! No indeed, sir, you shall not get away so lightly. But seriously now, Harold, you would hurt me if it were not so absurd. Do you think that a woman's love is like this sunshade which I carry in my hand, a thing only fitted for the sunshine, and of no use when the winds blow and the clouds gather?"

"I would not drag you down, Clara."

"Should I not be dragged down, indeed, if I left your side at such a time? It is only now that I can be of use to you, help you, sustain you. You have always been so strong, so above me. You are strong still, but then two will be stronger. Besides, sir, you have no idea what a woman of business I am. Papa says so, and he knows."

Harold tried to speak, but his heart was too full. He could only press the white hand which curled around his sleeve. She walked up and down by his side, prattling merrily, and sending little gleams of

cheeriness through the gloom which girt him in. To listen to her, he might have thought that it was Ida, and not her staid and demure sister, who was chatting to him.

"It will soon be cleared up," said she, "and then we shall feel quite dull. Of course all business men have these little ups and downs. Why, I suppose, of all the men you meet upon 'Change, there is not one who has not some such story to tell. If everything was always smooth, you know, then of course everyone would turn stockbroker, and you would have to hold your meetings in Hyde Park. How much is it that you need?"

"More than I can ever get. Not less than thirteen thousand pounds!"

Clara's face fell as she heard the amount.

"What do you purpose doing?"

"I shall go to the City now, and I shall ask all our creditors to meet me to-morrow. I shall read them Pearson's letter, and put myself into their hands."

"And they—what will they do?"

"What can they do? They will serve writs for their money, and the firm will be declared bankrupt."

"And the meeting will be to-morrow, you say? Will you take my advice?"

"What is it, Clara?"

"To ask them for a few days of delay. Who knows what new turn matters may take?"

"What turn can they take? I have no means of raising the money."

"Let us have a few days."

"Oh, we should have that in the ordinary course of business. The legal formalities would take them some little time. But I must go, Clara; I must not seem to shirk. My place now must be at my offices."

"Yes, dear, you are right. God bless you and guard you! I shall be here in 'The Wilderness,' but all day I shall be by your office-table at Throgmorton Street in spirit; and if ever you should be sad, you will hear my little whisper in your ear, and know that there is one client whom you will never be able to get rid of—never as long as we both live, dear!"

CHAPTER XII.

Friends in Need.



"NOW, papa," said Clara that morning, wrinkling her brows and putting her finger-tips together with the air of an experienced person of business, "I want to have a talk to you about money matters."

"Yes, my dear."

He laid down his paper, and looked a question.

"Kindly tell me again, papa, how much money I have in my very own right. You have often told me before, but I always forget figures."

"You have two hundred and fifty pounds a year of your own under your aunt's will."

"And Ida?"

"Ida has one hundred and fifty."

"Now, I think I can live very well on fifty pounds a year, papa. I am not very extravagant, and I could make my own dresses if I had a sewing-machine."

"Very likely, dear."

"In that case I have two hundred a year which I could do without."

"If it were necessary."

"But it is necessary. Oh, do help me, like a good, dear, kind papa, in this matter, for my whole heart is set upon it. Harold is in sore need of money, and through no fault of his own."

With a woman's tact and eloquence she told the whole story.

"Put yourself in my place, papa. What is the money to me? I never think of it from year's end to year's end. But now I know how precious it is. I could not have thought that money could be so valuable. See what I can do with it! It may help to save him. I must have it by to-morrow. Oh! do, do advise me as to what I should do, and how I should get the money."

The doctor smiled at her eagerness.

"You are as anxious to get rid of money as others are to gain it," said he. "In another case I might think it rash; but I believe in your Harold, and I can see that he has had villainous treatment. You will let me deal with the matter."

"You, papa?"

"It can be done best between men. Your capital, Clara, is some five thousand pounds, but it is out on a mortgage, and you could not call it in."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"But we can still manage. I have as much at my bank. I will advance it to the Denvers as coming from you, and you can repay it to me, or the interest of it, when your money becomes due."

"Oh, that is beautiful! How sweet and kind of you!"

"But there is one obstacle: I do not think that you would ever induce Harold to take this money."

Clara's face fell. "Don't you think so, really?"

"I am sure that he would not."

"Then what are you to do? What horrid things money matters are to arrange!"

"I shall see his father. We can manage it all between us."

"Oh, do, do, papa! And you will do it soon?"

"There is no time like the present. I will go in at once."

He scribbled a cheque, put it in an envelope, put on his broad straw hat, and strolled in through the garden to pay his morning call.

It was a singular sight which met his eyes as he entered the sitting-room of the admiral. A great



"A singular sight which met his eyes."

sea-chest stood open in the centre, and all round upon the carpet were little piles of jerseys, oilskins, books, sextant boxes, instruments, and sea-boots. The old seaman sat gravely amidst this lumber,

turning it over, and examining it intently; while his wife, with the tears running silently down her ruddy cheeks, sat upon the sofa, her elbows upon her knees and her chin upon her hands, rocking herself slowly backwards and forwards.

"Hullo, doctor!" said the admiral, holding out his hand. "There's foul weather set in upon us, as you may have heard; but I have ridden out many a worse squall, and, please God, we shall all three of us weather this one also, though two of us are a little more cranky than we were."

"My dear friends, I came in to tell you how deeply we sympathise with you all. My girl has only just told me about it."

"It has come so suddenly upon us, doctor," sobbed Mrs. Hay Denver. "I thought that I had John to myself for the rest of our lives—Heaven knows that we have not seen very much of each other—but now he talks of going to sea again."

"Aye, aye, Walker, that's the only way out of it. When I first heard of it I was thrown up in the wind with all aback. I give you my word that I lost my bearings more completely than ever since I strapped a middy's dirk to my belt. You see, friend, I know something of shipwreck or battle or whatever may come upon the waters, but the shoals in the City of London on which my poor boy has struck are clean beyond me. Pearson had been my pilot there, and now I know him to be a rogue. But I've taken by bearings now, and I see my course right before me."

"What then, admiral?"

"Oh! I have one or two little plans. I'll have

some news for the boy. Why, hang it, Walker man, I may be a bit stiff in the joints, but you'll be my witness that I can do my twelve miles under the three hours. What then? My eyes are as good as ever, except just for the newspaper. My head is clear. I'm three-and-sixty, but I'm as good a man as ever I was—too good a man to lie up for another ten years. I'd be the better for a smack of the salt water again, and a whiff of the breeze. Tut, mother, it's not a four years' cruise this time. I'll be back every month or two. It's no more than if I went for a visit in the country."

He was talking boisterously, and heaping his sea-boots and sextants back into his chest.

"And you really think, my dear friend, of hoisting your pennant again?"

"My pennant, Walker? No, no! Her Majesty, God bless her! has too many young men to need an old hulk like me. I shall be plain Mr. Hay Denver, of the merchant service. I daresay that I might find some owner who would give me a chance as second or third officer. It will be strange to me to feel the rails of the bridge under my fingers once more."

"Tut! tut! this will never do, this will never do, admiral!"

The doctor sat down by Mrs. Hay Denver, and patted her hand in token of friendly sympathy.

"We must wait until your son has had it out with all these people, and then we shall know what damage is done, and how best to set it right. It will be time enough then to begin to muster our resources to meet it."

"Our resources!" The admiral laughed.

"There's the pension. I'm afraid, Walker, that our resources won't need much mustering."

"Oh, come! there are some which you may not have thought of. For example, admiral, I had always intended that my girl should have five thousand from me when she married. Of course your boy's trouble is her trouble, and the money cannot be spent better than in helping to set it right. She has a little of her own, which she wished to contribute, but I thought it best to work it this way. Will you take the cheque, Mrs. Denver? and I think it would be best if you said nothing to Harold about it, and just used it as the occasion served."

"God bless you, Walker! You are a true friend. I won't forget this, Walker!"

The admiral sat down on his sea-chest, and mopped his brow with his red handkerchief.

"What is it to me whether you have it now or then? It may be more useful now. There's only one stipulation. If things should come to the worst, and if the business should prove so bad that nothing can set it right, then hold back this cheque; for there is no use in pouring water into a broken basin, and if the lad should fall, he will want something to pick himself up again with."

"He shall not fall, Walker; and you shall not have occasion to be ashamed of the family into which your daughter is about to marry. I have my own plan. But we shall hold your money, my friend, and it will strengthen us to feel that it is there."

"Well, that is all right," said Doctor Walker,

rising. "And if a little more should be needed, we must not let him go wrong for the want of a thousand or two. And now, admiral, I'm off for my morning walk; won't you come too?"

"No, I am going into town."

"Well, good-bye! I hope to have better news, and that all will come right. Good-bye, Mrs. Denver; I feel as if the boy were my own, and I shall not be easy until all is right with him."

CHAPTER XIII.

In Strange Waters.

WHEN Doctor Walker had departed, the admiral packed all his possessions back into his sea-chest, with the exception of one little brass-bound desk. This he unlocked, and took from it a dozen or so blue sheets of paper, all mottled over with stamps and seals, with very large V.R.'s printed upon the heads of them. He tied these carefully into a small bundle, and placing them in the inner pocket of his coat, he seized his stick and hat.

"Oh, John, don't do this rash thing!" cried Mrs. Denver, laying her hands upon his sleeve. "I have seen so little of you, John; only three years since you left the service. Don't leave me again! I know it is weak of me, but I cannot bear it."

"There's my own brave lass," said he, smoothing down the grey-shot hair. "We've lived in honour together, mother, and, please God, in honour we'll die. No matter how debts are made, they have got to be met; and what the boy owes, we owe. He has not the money, and how is he to find it? He can't find it. What then? It becomes my business, and there's only one way for it.'

"But it may not be so very bad, John. Had

we not best wait until after he sees these people to-morrow?"

"They may give him little time, lass; but I'll have a care that I don't go so far that I can't put back again. Now, mother, there's no use holding me; it's got to be done, and there's no sense in shirking it."

He detached her fingers from his sleeve, pushed her gently back into an arm-chair, and hurried from the house.

In less than half-an-hour the admiral was whirled into Victoria Station, and found himself amid a dense, bustling throng, who jostled and pushed in the crowded terminus. His errand, which had seemed feasible enough in his own room, began now to present difficulties in the carrying out, and he puzzled over how he should take the first steps. Amid the stream of business men, each hurrying on his definite way, the old seaman, in his grey tweed suit and black soft hat, strode slowly along, his head sunk and his brow wrinkled in perplexity. Suddenly an idea occurred to him. He walked back to the railway stall and bought a daily paper. This he turned and turned until a certain column met his eye, when he smoothed it out, and, carrying it over to a seat, proceeded to read it at his leisure.

And, indeed, as a man read that column, it seemed strange to him that there should still remain anyone in this world of ours who should be in straits for want of money. Here were whole lines of gentlemen who were burdened with a surplus in their incomes, and who were loudly calling to the poor and needy to come and take it off their hands.

Here was the guileless person who was not a professional money-lender, but who would be glad to correspond, &c. Here, too, was the accommodating individual who advanced sums from ten to ten thousand pounds without expense, security, or delay. "The money actually paid over within a few hours," ran this fascinating advertisement, conjuring up a vision of swift messengers rushing with bags of gold to the aid of the poor struggler. A third gentleman did all business by personal application, advanced money on anything or nothing; the lightest and airiest promise was enough to content him, according to his circular, and finally he never asked for more than five per cent. This struck the admiral as far the most promising, and his wrinkles relaxed and his frown softened away as he gazed at it. He folded up the paper, rose from the seat, and found himself face to face with Charles Westmacott.

"Hullo, admiral!"

"Hullo, Westmacott!" (Charles had always been a favourite of the seaman's.) "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I have been doing a little business for my aunt. But I have never seen you in London before."

"I hate the place! It smothers me; there's not a breath of clean air on this side of Greenwich. But maybe you know your way about pretty well in the City?"

"Well, I know something about it. You see, I've never lived very far from it, and I do a good deal of my aunt's business."

"Maybe you know Bread Street?"

"It is out of Cheapside."

"Well, then, how do you steer for it from here? You make me out a course and I'll keep to it."

"Why, admiral, I have nothing to do; I'll take you there with pleasure."

"Will you, though? Well, I'd take it very kindly if you would. I have business there—Smith and Hanbury, financial agents, Bread Street."

The pair made their way to the river-side, and so down the Thames to St. Paul's landing—a mode of travel which was much more to the admiral's taste than 'bus or cab. On the way, he told his companion his mission and the causes which had led to it. Charles Westmacott knew little enough of City life and the ways of business, but at least he had more experience in both than the admiral, and he made up his mind not to leave him until the matter was settled.

"These are the people," said the admiral, twisting round his paper and pointing to the advertisement which had seemed to him the most promising. "It sounds honest and above-board, does it not? The personal interview looks as if there were no trickery; and then, no one could object to five per cent."

"No, it seems fair enough."

"It is not pleasant to have to go hat in hand borrowing money; but there are times, as you may find before you are my age, Westmacott, when a man must stow away his pride. But here's their number, and their plate is on the corner of the door."

A narrow entrance was flanked on either side by a row of brasses, ranging upwards from the ship-brokers and the solicitors who occupied the ground-floors, through a long succession of West Indian agents, architects, surveyors, and brokers, to the firm of which they were in quest. A winding stone stair, well-carpeted and railed at first, but growing shabbier with every landing, brought them past innumerable doors, until at last, just under the ground-glass roofing, the names of Smith and Hanbury were to be seen painted in large white letters across a panel, with a laconic invitation to push beneath it. Following out the suggestion, the admiral and his companion found themselves in a dingy apartment, ill lit from a couple of glazed windows. An ink-stained table, littered with pens, papers, and almanacs; an American-cloth sofa, three chairs of varying patterns, and a much-worn carpet, constituted all the furniture, save only a very large and obtrusive porcelain spittoon, and a gaudily-framed and very sombre picture which hung above the fireplace. Sitting in front of this picture, and staring gloomily at it, as being the only thing which he could stare at, was a small, sallow-faced boy with a large head, who in the intervals of his art studies munched sedately at an apple.

"Is Mr. Smith or Mr. Hanbury in?" asked the admiral.

"There ain't no such people," said the small boy.

"But you have the names on the door."

"Ah, that is the name of the firm, you see. It's only a name; it's Mr. Reuben Metaxa that you wants."

"Well, then, is he in?"

"No, he's not."

"When will he be back?"

"Can't tell, I'm sure. He's gone to lunch; sometimes he takes one hour, and sometimes two. It'll be two to-day, I 'spect, for he said he was hungry afore he went."

"Then I suppose that we had better call again," said the admiral.

"Not a bit!" cried Charles. "I know how to manage these little imps. See here, you young varmint, here's a shilling for you; run off and fetch your master. If you don't bring him here in five minutes, I'll clump you on the side of the head when you get back. Shoo! Scat!"

He charged at the youth, who bolted from the room and clattered madly downstairs.

"He'll fetch him," said Charles. "Let us make ourselves at home. This sofa does not feel over and above safe; it was not meant for fifteen-stone men. But this doesn't look quite the sort of place where one would expect to pick up money."

"Just what I was thinking," said the admiral, looking ruefully about him.

"Ah, well! I have heard that the best-furnished offices generally belong to the poorest firms. Let us hope it's the opposite here. They can't spend much on the management, anyhow; that pumpkin-headed boy was the staff, I suppose. Ha, by Jove! that's his voice; and he's got our man, I think."

As he spoke, the youth appeared in the doorway with a small, brown, dried-up little chip of a man at his heels. He was clean-shaven and blue-chinned,

with bristling black hair, and keen brown eyes, which shone out very brightly from between pouched under-lids and drooping upper ones. He advanced, glancing keenly from one to the other of his visitors, and slowly rubbing together his thin, blue-veined hands. The small boy closed the door behind him and discreetly vanished.

"I am Mr. Reuben Metaxa," said the money-lender. "Was it about an advance you wished to see me?"

"Yes."

"For you, I presume?" turning to Charles Westmacott.

"No, for this gentleman."

The money-lender looked surprised.

"How much did you desire?"

"I thought of five thousand pounds," said the admiral.

"And on what security?"

"I am a retired admiral of the British navy. You will find my name in the Navy List; there is my card. I have here my pension papers; I get £850 a year. I thought that perhaps if you were to hold these papers, it would be security enough that I should pay you. You could draw my pension, and repay yourselves at the rate, say, of £500 a year, taking your five per cent. interest as well."

"What interest?"

"Five per cent. per annum."

Mr. Metaxa laughed.

"Per annum!" he said; "five per cent. a month!"

"A month! That would be sixty per cent. a year!"

"Precisely."

"But that is monstrous."

"I don't ask gentlemen to come to me; they come of their own free will. Those are my terms, and they can take it or leave it."

"Then I shall leave it."

The admiral rose angrily from his chair.

"But one moment, sir. Just sit down, and we shall chat the matter over. Yours is a rather unusual case, and we may find some other way of doing what you wish. Of course the security which you offer is no security at all, and no sane man would advance five thousand pennies on it."

"No security? Why not, sir?"

"You might die to-morrow; you are not a young man. What age are you?"

"Sixty-three."

Mr. Metaxa turned over a long column of figures.

"Here is an actuary's table," said he. "At your time of life the average expectancy of life is only a few years even in a well-preserved man."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I am not a well-preserved man?"

"Well, admiral, it is a trying life at sea. Sailors in their younger days are gay dogs, and take it out of themselves. Then, when they grow older, they are still hard at it, and have no chance of rest or peace. I do not think a sailor's life a good one."

"I'll tell you what, sir," said the admiral, hotly, "if you have two pairs of gloves, I'll undertake to knock you out under three rounds; or I'll race you from here to St. Paul's, and my friend here will see fair. I'll let you see whether I am an old man or not!"

"This is beside the question," said the money-lender, with a deprecatory shrug. "The point is, that if you died to-morrow, where would be the security then?"

"I could insure my life, and make the policy over to you."

"Your premiums for such a sum, if any office would have you, which I very much doubt, would come to close on five hundred a year. That would hardly suit your book."

"Well, sir, what do you intend to propose?" asked the admiral.

"I might, to accommodate you, work it in another way. I should send for a medical man, and have an opinion upon your life. Then I might see what could be done."

"That is quite fair; I have no objection to that."

"There is a very clever doctor in the street here. Proudie is his name. John, go and fetch Doctor Proudie."

The youth was dispatched upon his errand, while Mr. Metaxa sat at his desk trimming his nails, and shooting out little comments upon the weather. Presently, feet were heard upon the stairs; the money-lender hurried out, there was a sound of whispering, and he returned with a large, fat, greasy-looking man, clad in a much-worn frock-coat, and a very dilapidated top-hat.

"Doctor Proudie, gentlemen," said Mr. Metaxa.

The doctor bowed, smiled, whipped off his hat, and produced his stethoscope from its interior, with the air of a conjurer upon the stage.

"Which of these gentlemen am I to examine?" he asked, blinking from one to the other of them. "Ah, it is you! Only your waistcoat! You need not undo your collar. Thank you! A full breath! Thank you! Ninety-nine! Thank you! Now hold your breath for a moment. Oh, dear, dear! what is this I hear?"

"What is it then?" asked the admiral, coolly.

"Tut! tut! This is a great pity. Have you had rheumatic fever?"

"Never."

"You have had some serious illness?"

"Never."

"Ah, you are an admiral! You have been abroad, tropics, malaria, ague—I know."

"I have never had a day's illness."

"Not to your knowledge; but you have inhaled unhealthy air, and it has left its effect. You have an organic murmur—slight, but distinct."

"Is it dangerous?"

"It might at any time become so. You should not take violent exercise."

"Oh, indeed! It would hurt me to run a half-mile?"

"It would be very dangerous."

"And a mile?"

"Would be almost certainly fatal."

"Then there is nothing else the matter?"

"No; but if the heart is weak, then everything is weak, and the life is not a sound one."

"You see, admiral," remarked Mr. Metaxa, as the doctor secreted his stethoscope once more in his hat, "my remarks were not entirely uncalled-for. I

am sorry that the doctor's opinion is not more favourable; but this is a matter of business, and certain obvious precautions must be taken."

"Of course. Then the matter is at an end?"

"Well, we might even now do business. I am most anxious to be of use to you. How long do you think, doctor, that this gentleman will in all probability live?"

"Well, well, it's rather a delicate question to answer," said Mr. Proudie, with a show of embarrassment.

"Not a bit, sir. Out with it! I have faced death too often to flinch from it now, though I saw it as near me as you are."

"Well, well, we must go by averages, of course. Shall we say two years? I should think that you have a full two years before you."

"In two years your pension would bring you in £1,600. Now, I will do my very best for you, admiral! I will advance you £2,000, and you can make over to me your pension for your life. It is pure speculation on my part. If you die to-morrow, I lose my money; if the doctor's prophecy is correct, I shall still be out of pocket. If you live a little longer, then I may see my money again. It is the very best I can do for you."

"Then you wish to buy my pension?"

"Yes, for two thousand down."

"And if I live for twenty years?"

"Oh! in that case, of course my speculation would be more successful. But you have heard the doctor's opinion."

"Would you advance the money instantly?"

"You should have a thousand at once. The other thousand I should expect you to take in furniture."

"In furniture?"

"Yes, admiral; we shall do you a beautiful houseful at that sum. It is the custom of my clients to take half in furniture."

The admiral sat in dire perplexity. He had come out to get money; and to go back without any, to be powerless to help when his boy needed every shilling to save him from disaster—that would be very bitter to him. On the other hand, it was so much that he surrendered, and so little that he received. Little, and yet something. Would it not be better than going back empty-handed? He saw the yellow-backed cheque-book upon the table. The money-lender opened it, and dipped his pen into the ink.

"Shall I fill it up?" said he.

"I think, admiral," remarked Westmacott, "that we had better have a little walk and some luncheon before we settle this matter."

"Oh, we may as well do it at once! It would be absurd to postpone it now."

Metaxa spoke with some heat, and his eyes glinted angrily from between his narrow lids at the imperturbable Charles. The admiral was simple in money matters, but he had seen much of men, and had learned to read them. He saw that venomous glance, and saw, too, that intense eagerness was peeping out from beneath the careless air which the agent had assumed.

"You're quite right, Westmacott," said he; "we'll have a little walk before we settle it."

"But I may not be here this afternoon."

"Then we must choose another day."

"But why not settle it now?"

"Because I prefer not," said the admiral, shortly.

"Very well. But remember that my offer is only for to-day. It is off unless you take it at once."

"Let it be off, then."

"There's my fee!" cried the doctor.

"How much?"

"A guinea."

The admiral threw a pound and a shilling upon the table.

"Come, Westmacott," said he, and they walked together from the room.

"I don't like it," said Charles, when they found themselves in the street once more; "I don't profess to be a very sharp chap, but this is a trifle too thin. What did he want to go out and speak to the doctor for? And how very convenient this tale of a weak heart was! I believe they are a couple of rogues, and in league with each other."

"A shark and a pilot fish," said the admiral.

"I'll tell you what I propose, sir. There's a lawyer named McAdam, who does my aunt's business. He is a very honest fellow, and lives at the other side of Poultry. We'll go over to him together, and have his opinion about the whole matter."

"How far is it to his place?"

"Oh, a mile at least! We can have a cab."

"A mile? Then we shall see if there is any truth in what that swab of a doctor said. Come, my boy, and clap on all sail, and see who can stay the longest."

Then the sober denizens of the heart of business London saw a singular sight as they returned from their luncheons. Down the roadway, dodging among cabs and carts, ran a weather-stained elderly man, with wide flapping black hat and homely suit of tweeds. With elbows braced back, hands clenched near his armpits, and chest protruded, he scudded along, while close at his heels lumbered a large-limbed, heavy, yellow-moustached young man, who seemed to feel the exercise a good deal more than his senior. On they dashed, helter-skelter, until they pulled up panting at the office where the lawyer of the Westmacotts was to be found.

"There now!" cried the admiral, in triumph. "What d'ye think of that? Nothing wrong in the engine-room, eh?"

"You seem fit enough, sir."

"Blessed if I believe the swab was a certificated doctor at all. He was flying false colours, or I am mistaken."

"They keep the directories and registers in this eating-house," said Westmacott. "We'll go and look him out."

They did so, but the medical rolls contained no such name as that of Dr. Proudie of Bread Street.

"Pretty villainy this!" cried the admiral, thumping his chest. "A dummy doctor and a vamped-up disease. Well, we've tried the rogues, Westmacott. Let us see what we can do with your honest man."

CHAPTER XIV.

Eastward Ho!



R. McADAM, of the firm of McAdam and Squire, was a highly-polished man, who dwelt behind a highly-polished table in the neatest and snuggest of offices. He was white-haired and amiable, with a deep-lined aquiline face; was addicted to low bows, and, indeed, always seemed to carry himself at half-cock, as though just descending into one, or just recovering himself. He wore a high-buckled stock, took snuff, and adorned his conversation with little scraps from the classics.

"My dear sir," said he, when he had listened to their story, "any friend of Mrs. Westmacott's is a friend of mine. Try a pinch? I wonder that you should have gone to this man Metaxa. His advertisement is enough to condemn him. *Habet fænum in cornu.* They are all rogues."

"The doctor was a rogue too. I didn't like the look of him at the time."

"*Arcades ambo.* But now we must see what we can do for you. Of course what Metaxa said was perfectly right. The pension is in itself no security at all, unless it were accompanied by a life assurance,

which would be an income in itself. It is no good whatever."

His clients' faces fell.

"But there is the second alternative. You might sell the pension right out. Speculative investors occasionally deal in such things. I have one client, a sporting man, who would be very likely to take it up if we could agree upon terms. Of course I must follow Metaxa's example by sending for a doctor."

For the second time was the admiral punched and tapped and listened to. This time, however, there could be no question of the qualifications of the doctor, a well-known Fellow of the College of Surgeons, and his report was as favourable as the other's had been adverse.

"He has the heart and chest of a man of forty," said he. "I can recommend his life as one of the best of his age that I have ever examined."

"That's well," said Mr. McAdam, making a note of the doctor's remarks, while the admiral disbursed a second guinea. "Your price, I understand, is five thousand pounds. I can communicate with Mr. Elberry, my client, and let you know whether he cares to touch the matter. Meanwhile you can leave your pension papers here, and I will give you a receipt for them."

"Very well. I should like the money soon."

"That is why I am retaining the papers. If I can see Mr. Elberry to-day, we may let you have a cheque to-morrow. Try another pinch. No? Well, good-bye. I am very happy to have been of service."

Mr. McAdam bowed them out, for he was a very busy man, and they found themselves in the street

once more, but with lighter hearts than when they had left it.

"Well, Westmacott, I am sure I am very much obliged to you," said the admiral. "You have stood by me when I was the better for a little help, for I'm clean out of my soundings among these City sharks. But I've something to do now which is more in my own line, and I need not trouble you any more."

"Oh, it is no trouble! I have nothing to do—I never have anything to do. I don't suppose I could do it if I had. I should be delighted to come with you, sir, if I can be of any use."

"No, no, my lad. You go home again. It would be kind of you, though, if you would look in at No. 1 when you get back, and tell my wife that all's well with me, and that I'll be back in an hour or so."

"All right, sir, I'll tell her."

Westmacott raised his hat and strode away to the westward, while the admiral, after a hurried lunch, bent his steps towards the east.

It was a long walk, but the old seaman swung along at a rousing pace, leaving street after street behind him. The great business palaces dwindled down into commonplace shops and dwellings, which decreased and became more stunted, even as the folk who filled them did, until he was deep in the evil places of the eastern end. It was a land of huge dark houses and of garish gin-shops; a land, too, where life moves irregularly and where adventures are to be gained—as the admiral was to learn to his cost.

He was hurrying down one of the long, narrow, stone-flagged lanes between the double lines of crouching, dishevelled women and of dirty children who sat on the hollowed steps of the houses, and basked in the autumn sun. At one side was a barrowman with a load of walnuts, and beside the barrow a bedraggled woman with a black fringe and a chequered shawl thrown over her head. She was cracking walnuts and picking them out of the shells, throwing out a remark occasionally to a rough man in a rabbitskin cap, with straps under the knees of his corduroy trousers, who stood puffing a black clay pipe with his back against the wall. What the cause of the quarrel was, or what sharp sarcasm from the woman's lips pricked suddenly through that thick skin, may never be known, but suddenly the man took his pipe in his left hand, leaned forward, and deliberately struck her across the face with his right. It was a slap rather than a blow, but the woman gave a sharp cry and cowered up against the barrow with her hand to her cheek.

"You infernal villain!" cried the admiral, raising his stick. "You brute and blackguard!"

"Garn!" growled the rough, with the deep rasping intonation of a savage. "Garn out o' this, or I'll——"

He took a step forward with uplifted hand, but in an instant down came cut number three upon his wrist, and cut number five across his thigh, and cut number one full in the centre of his rabbitskin cap. It was not a heavy stick, but it was strong enough to leave a good red weal wherever it fell. The rough

yelled with pain, and rushed in, hitting with both hands, and kicking with his iron-shod boots; but the admiral had still a quick foot and a true eye, so that he bounded backwards and sideways, still raining a shower of blows upon his savage antagonist. Suddenly, however, a pair of arms closed round his neck, and glancing backwards he caught a glimpse of the black coarse fringe of the woman whom he had befriended.

"I've got 'im!" she shrieked. "I'll 'old 'im! Now, Bill, knock the tripe out of him!"

Her grip was as strong as a man's, and her wrist pressed like an iron bar upon the admiral's throat. He made a desperate effort to disengage himself, but the most that he could do was to swing her round, so as to place her between his adversary and himself. As it proved, it was the very best thing that he could have done. The rough, half-blinded and maddened by the blows which he had received, struck out with all his ungainly strength just as his partner's head swung round in front of him. There was a noise like that of a stone hitting a wall, a deep groan, her grasp relaxed, and she dropped a dead weight upon the pavement, while the admiral sprang back and raised his stick once more, ready either for attack or defence. Neither were needed, however, for at that moment there was a scattering of the crowd, and two police-constables, burly and helmeted, pushed their way through the rabble. At the sight of them the rough took to his heels, and was instantly screened from view by a veil of his friends and neighbours.

"I have been assaulted," panted the admiral.

"This woman was attacked, and I had to defend her."

"This is Bermondsey Sal," said one police-officer, bending over the bedraggled heap of tattered shawl and dirty skirt. "She's got it hot this time!"



"I've got 'im!" she shrieked.

"He was a shortish man, thick, with a beard."

"Ah! that's Black Davie. He's been up four

times for beating her. He's about done the job now. If I were you, I would let that sort settle their own little affairs, sir."

"Do you think that a man who holds the Queen's commission will stand by and see a woman struck?" cried the admiral indignantly.

"Well, just as you like, sir. But you've lost your watch, I see."

"My watch!"

He clapped his hand to his waistcoat. The chain was hanging down in front, and the watch gone.

He passed his hand over his forehead.

"I would not have lost that watch for anything," said he. "No money could replace it. It was given me by the ship's company after our African cruise. It has an inscription."

The policeman shrugged his shoulders.

"It comes from meddling," said he.

"What'll you give me if I tell yer where it is?" said a sharp-faced boy among the crowd. "Will you gimme a quid?"

"Certainly."

"Well, where's the quid?"

The admiral took a sovereign from his pocket.

"Here it is."

"Then 'ere's the ticker!"

The boy pointed to the clenched hand of the senseless woman. A glimmer of gold shone out from between the fingers, and on opening them up there was the admiral's chronometer. This interesting victim had throttled her protector with one hand, while she had robbed with the other.

The admiral left his address with the policeman,

satisfied himself that the woman was only stunned, not dead, and then set off upon his way once more, the poorer perhaps in his faith in human nature, but in very good spirits none the less. He walked with dilated nostrils and clenched hands, all glowing and tingling with the excitement of the combat, and warmed with the thought that he could still, when there was need, take his own part in a street brawl, in spite of his threescore and odd years.

His way now led towards the river-side regions, and a cleansing whiff of tar was to be detected in the stagnant autumn air. Men with the blue jersey and peaked cap of the boatman, or the white ducks of the dockers, began to replace the corduroys and fustian of the labourers. Shops with nautical instruments in the windows, rope and paint sellers, and slop-shops with long rows of oilskins dangling from hooks, all proclaimed the neighbourhood of the docks. The admiral quickened his pace and straightened his figure as his surroundings became more nautical, until at last, peeping between two high dingy wharfs, he caught a glimpse of the mud-coloured waters of the Thames, and of the bristle of masts and funnels which rose from its broad bosom. To the right lay a quiet street, with many brass-plates upon either side, and wire blinds in all of the windows. The admiral walked slowly down it until "The St. Lawrence Shipping Company" caught his eye. He crossed the road, pushed open the door, and found himself in a low-ceilinged office, with a long counter at one end, and a great number of wooden sections of ships stuck upon boards and plastered all over the walls.

"Is Mr. Henry in?" asked the admiral.

"No, sir," answered an elderly man from a high seat in the corner. "He has not come into town to-day. I can manage any business you may wish seen to."

"You don't happen to have a first or second officer's place vacant, do you?"

The manager looked with a dubious eye at this singular applicant.

"Do you hold certificates?" he asked.

"I hold every nautical certificate there is."

"Then you won't do for us."

"Why not?"

"Your age, sir."

"I give you my word that I can see as well as ever, and am as good a man in every way."

"I don't doubt it."

"Why should my age be a bar, then?"

"Well, I must put it plainly. If a man of your age, holding certificates, has not got past a second officer's berth, there must be a black mark against him somewhere. I don't know what it is, drink or temper, or want of judgment, but something there must be."

"I assure you there is nothing, but I find myself stranded, and so have to turn to the old business again."

"Oh, that's it!" said the manager, with suspicion in his eye. "How long were you in your last billet?"

"Fifty-one years."

"What!"

"Yes, sir, one-and-fifty years."

"In the same employ?"

"Yes."

"Why, you must have begun as a child."

"I was twelve when I joined."

"It must be a strangely managed business," said the manager, "which allows men to leave it who have served for fifty years, and who are still as good as ever. Who did you serve?"

"The Queen. Heaven bless her!"

"Oh, you were in the Royal Navy! What rating did you hold?"

"I am Admiral of the Fleet."

The manager started, and sprang down from his high stool.

"My name is Admiral Hay Denver. There is my card, and here are the records of my service. I don't, you understand, want to push any other man from his billet; but if you should chance to have a berth open, I should be very glad of it. I know the navigation from the Cod Banks right up to Montreal a great deal better than I know the streets of London."

The astonished manager glanced over the blue papers which his visitor had handed him.

"Won't you take a chair, admiral?" said he.

"Thank you. But I should be obliged if you would drop my title now. I told you because you asked me, but I've left the quarter-deck, and I am plain Mr. Hay Denver now."

"May I ask," said the manager, "are you the same Denver who commanded at one time on the North American station?"

"I did."

"Then it was you who got one of our boats—the *Comus*—off the rocks in the Bay of Fundy? The directors voted you three hundred guineas as salvage, and you refused them."

"It was an offer which should not have been made," said the admiral sternly.

"Well, it reflects credit upon you that you should think so. If Mr. Henry were here, I am sure that he would arrange this matter for you at once. As it is, I shall lay it before the directors to-day, and I am sure that they will be proud to have you in our employment, and, I hope, in some more suitable position than that which you suggest."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," said the admiral, and started off again, well pleased, upon his homeward journey.

CHAPTER XV.

Still Among Shoals.



EXT day brought the admiral a cheque for £5,000 from Mr. McAdam, and a stamped agreement by which he made over his pension papers to the speculative investor. It was not until he had signed and sent it off that the full significance of all that he had done broke upon him. He had sacrificed everything. His pension was gone. He had nothing save only what he could earn. But the stout old heart never quailed. He waited eagerly for a letter from the St. Lawrence Shipping Company, and in the meanwhile he gave his landlord a quarter's notice. Hundred pound a year houses would in future be a luxury which he could not aspire to. A small lodging in some inexpensive part of London must be the substitute for his breezy Norwood villa. So be it, then. Better that a thousandfold than that his name should be associated with failure and disgrace!

On that morning Harold Denver was to meet the creditors of the firm, and to explain the situation to them. It was a hateful task, a degrading task, but he set himself to do it with quiet resolution. At home they waited in intense anxiety to learn the result of the meeting. It was late before he

returned, haggard and pale, like a man who has done and suffered much.

"What 's this board in front of the house?" he asked.

"We are going to try a little change of scene," said the admiral. "This place is neither town nor country. But never mind that, boy. Tell us what happened in the City."

"God help me! My wretched business is driving you out of house and home!" cried Harold, broken down by this fresh evidence of the effects of his misfortunes. "It is easier for me to meet my creditors than to see you two suffering so patiently for my sake."

"Tut! tut!" cried the admiral. "There 's no suffering in the matter. Mother would rather be near the theatres. That 's at the bottom of it, isn't it, mother? You come and sit down here between us, and tell us all about it."

Harold sat down with a loving hand in each of his.

"It is not so bad as we thought," said he, "and yet it is bad enough. I have about ten days to find the money, but I don't know which way to turn for it. Pearson, however, lied, as usual, when he spoke of £13,000. The amount is not quite £7,000."

The admiral clapped his hands.

"I knew we should weather it after all! Hurrah, my boy! Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!"

Harold gazed at him in surprise, while the old seaman waved his arm above his head and bellowed out three stentorian cheers.

"Where am I to get seven thousand pounds from, dad?" he asked.

"Never mind. You spin your yarn."

"Well, they were very good and very kind, but of course they must have either their money or their money's worth. They passed a vote of sympathy with me, and agreed to wait ten days before they took any proceedings. Three of them, whose claim came to £3,500, told me that if I would give them my personal I.O.U., and pay interest at the rate of five per cent., their amounts might stand over as long as I wished. That will be a charge of £175 upon my income, but with economy I could meet it, and it diminishes the debt by one-half."

Again the admiral burst out cheering.

"There remains, therefore, about £3,200, which has to be found within ten days. No man shall lose by me. I gave them my word in the room that if I worked my soul out of my body, every one of them should be paid. I shall not spend a penny upon myself until it is done. But some of them can't wait. They are poor men themselves, and must have their money. They have issued a warrant for Pearson's arrest. But they think that he has got away to the States."

"These men *shall* have their money," said the admiral.

"Dad!"

"Yes, my boy, you don't know the resources of the family. One never does know until one tries. What have you yourself now?"

"I have about a thousand pounds invested."

"All right. And I have about as much more. There's a good start. Now, mother, it is your turn. What is that little bit of paper of yours?"

Mrs. Denver unfolded it, and placed it upon Harold's knee.

"Five thousand pounds!" he gasped.

"Ah! but mother is not the only rich one. Look at this!"

And the admiral unfolded his cheque, and placed it upon the other knee.

Harold gazed from one to the other in bewilderment.

"Ten thousand pounds!" he cried. "Good heavens! where did these come from?"

"You will not worry any longer, dear?" murmured his mother, slipping her arm round him.

But his quick eye had caught the signature upon one of the cheques.

"Dr. Walker!" he cried, flushing. "This is Clara's doing. Oh, dad! we cannot take this money. It would not be right nor honourable."

"No, boy. I am glad you think so. It is something, however, to have proved one's friend, for a real good friend he is. It was he who brought it in, though Clara sent him. But this other money will be enough to cover everything, and it is all my own."

"Your own? Where did you get it, dad?"

"Tut! tut! See what it is to have a City man to deal with. It is my own, and fairly earned, and that is enough."

"Dear old dad!" Harold squeezed his gnarled hand. "And you, mother! You have lifted the trouble from my heart. I feel another man. You have saved my honour, my good name, everything! I cannot owe you more, for I owe you everything already."

So while the autumn sunset shone ruddily through the broad window these three sat together hand in hand, with hearts which were too full to speak. Suddenly the soft thudding of tennis-balls was heard, and Mrs. Westmacott bounded into view upon the lawn, with brandished racket and short skirts fluttering in the breeze. The sight came as a relief to their strained nerves, and they all three burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"She is playing with her nephew," said Harold at last. "The Walkers have not come out yet. I think that it would be well if you were to give me that cheque, mother, and I were to return it in person."

"Certainly, Harold. I think it would be very nice."

He went in through the garden. Clara and the doctor were sitting together in the dining-room. She sprang to her feet at the sight of him.

"Oh, Harold, I have been waiting for you so impatiently!" she cried. "I saw you pass the front windows half-an-hour ago. I would have come in if I dared. Do tell us what has happened."

"I have come in to thank you both. How can I repay you for your kindness? Here is your cheque, doctor. I have not needed it. I find that I can lay my hands on enough to pay my creditors."

"Thank God!" cried Clara, fervently.

"The sum is less than I thought, and our resources considerably more. We have been able to do it with ease."

"With ease!" The doctor's brow clouded, and his manner grew cold. "I think, Harold, that you

would do better to take this money of mine than to use that which seems to you to be gained with ease."

"Thank you, sir. If I borrowed from anyone, it would be from you. But my father has this very sum—five thousand pounds; and, as I tell him, I owe him so much that I have no compunction about owing him more."

"No compunction! Surely there are some sacrifices which a son should not allow his parents to make?"

"Sacrifices! What do you mean?"

"Is it possible that you do not know how this money has been obtained?"

"I give you my word, Doctor Walker, that I have no idea. I asked my father, but he refused to tell me."

"I thought not," said the doctor, the gloom clearing from his brow. "I was sure that you were not a man who, to clear yourself from a little money difficulty, would sacrifice the happiness of your mother and the health of your father."

"Good gracious! what do you mean?"

"It is only right that you should know. That money represents the commutation of your father's pension. He has reduced himself to poverty, and intends to go to sea again to earn a living."

"To sea again! Impossible!"

"It is the truth. Charles Westmacott has told Ida. He was with him in the City when he took his poor pension about from dealer to dealer trying to sell it. He succeeded at last, and hence the money."

"He has sold his pension!" cried Harold, with

his hands to his face. "My dear old dad has sold his pension!"

He rushed from the room, and burst wildly into the presence of his parents once more.

"I cannot take it, father!" he cried. "Better bankruptcy than that. Oh, if I had only known your plan! We must have back the pension. Oh, mother, mother! how could you think me capable of such selfishness? Give me the cheque, dad, and I will see this man to-night, for I would sooner die like a dog in the ditch than touch a penny of this money!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A Midnight Visitor.



OW all this time, while the tragi-comedy of Life was being played in these three suburban villas, while on a commonplace stage love and humour and fears and lights and shadows were so swiftly succeeding each other, and while these three families, drifted together by fate, were shaping each other's destinies, and working out in their own fashion the strange, intricate ends of human life, there were human eyes which watched over every stage of the performance, and which were keenly critical of every actor on it. Across the road, beyond the green palings and the close-cropped lawn, behind the curtains of their creeper-framed windows, sat the two old ladies, Miss Bertha and Miss Monica Williams, looking out as from a private box at all that was being enacted before them. The growing friendship of the three families, the engagement of Harold Denver with Clara Walker, the engagement of Charles Westmacott with her sister, the dangerous fascination which the widow exercised over the doctor, the preposterous behaviour of the Walker girls, and the unhappiness which they had caused their father—not one of these incidents escaped the

notice of the two maiden ladies. Bertha, the younger, had a smile or a sigh for the lovers; Monica, the elder, a frown or a shrug for the elders. Every night they talked over what they had seen, and their own dull, uneventful life took a warmth and a colouring from their neighbours as a blank wall reflects a beacon fire.

And now it was destined that they should experience the one keen sensation of their later years, the one memorable incident from which all future incidents should be dated.

It was on the very night which succeeded the events which have just been narrated, when suddenly into Monica Williams's head, as she tossed upon her sleepless bed, there shot a thought which made her sit up with a thrill and a gasp.

"Bertha," said she, plucking at the shoulder of her sister, "I have left the front window open."

"No, Monica, surely not!"

Bertha sat up also, and thrilled in sympathy.

"I am sure of it. You remember I had forgotten to water the pots, and then I opened the window; and Jane called me about the jam, and I have never been in the room since."

"Good gracious, Monica! it is a mercy that we have not been murdered in our beds! There was a house broken into at Forest Hill last week. Shall we go down and shut it?"

"I dare not go down alone, dear, but if you will come with me. Put on your slippers and dressing-gown. We do not need a candle. Now, Bertha, we will go down together."

Two little white patches moved vaguely through

the darkness, the stairs creaked, the door whined, and they were at the front-room window. Monica closed it gently down, and fasted the snib.

"What a beautiful moon!" said she, looking out. "We can see as clearly as if it were day. How peaceful and quiet the three houses are over yonder! It seems quite sad to see that 'To Let' card upon number one. I wonder how number two will like their going? For my part I could better spare that dreadful woman at number three, with her short skirts and her snake. But, oh, Bertha, look! look! look!!"

Her voice had fallen suddenly to a quivering whisper, and she was pointing to the Westmacotts' house. Her sister gave a gasp of horror, and stood with a clutch at Monica's arm, staring in the same direction.

There was a light in the front room, a slight wavering light such as would be given by a small candle or taper. The blind was down, but the light shone dimly through. Outside, in the garden, with his figure outlined against the luminous square, there stood a man, his back to the road, his two hands upon the window-ledge, and his body rather bent, as though he were trying to peep in past the blind. So absolutely still and motionless was he that, in spite of the moon, they might well have overlooked him were it not for that tell-tale light behind.

"Good heaven!" gasped Bertha, "it is a burglar!"

But her sister set her mouth grimly, and shook her head.

"We shall see," she whispered. "It may be something worse."

Swiftly and furtively the man stood suddenly erect, and began to push the window slowly up. Then he put one knee upon the sash, glanced round to see that all was safe, and climbed over into the room. As he did so, he had to push the blind aside. Then the two spectators saw where the light came from. Mrs. Westmacott was standing, as rigid as a statue, in the centre of the room, with a lighted taper in her right hand. For an instant they caught a glimpse of her stern face and her white collar. Then the blind fell back into position, and the two figures disappeared from their view.

"Oh, that dreadful woman!" cried Monica. "That dreadful, dreadful woman! She was waiting for him: you saw it with your own eyes, sister Bertha!"

"Hush, dear; hush and listen!" said her more charitable companion.

They pushed their own window up once more, and watched from behind the curtains.

For a long time all was silent within the house. The light still stood motionless, as though Mrs. Westmacott remained rigidly in the one position, while from time to time a shadow passed in front of it to show that her midnight visitor was pacing up and down in front of her. Once they saw his outline clearly, with his hands outstretched as if in appeal or entreaty. Then suddenly there was a dull sound, a cry, the noise of a fall; the taper was extinguished, and a dark figure fled in the moonlight, rushed across the garden, and vanished amid the shrubs at the farther side.

Then only did the two old ladies understand that they had looked on whilst a tragedy had been enacted.

"Help!" they cried, and "Help!" in their high, thin voices, timidly at first, but gathering volume as they went on, until "The Wilderness" rang with their shrieks.

Lights shone in all the windows opposite, chains rattled, bars were unshot, doors opened, and out rushed friends to the rescue. Harold, with a stick; the admiral, with his sword, his grey head and bare feet protruding from either end of a long brown ulster; finally, Doctor Walker, with a poker—all ran to the help of the Westmacotts. Their door had been already opened, and they crowded tumultuously into the front room.

Charles Westmacott, white to his lips, was kneeling on the floor, supporting his aunt's head upon his knee. She lay outstretched, dressed in her ordinary clothes, the extinguished taper still grasped in her hand, no mark or wound upon her—pale, placid, and senseless.

"Thank God you are come, doctor," said Charles, looking up. "Do tell me how she is, and what I should do."

Doctor Walker kneeled beside her, and passed his left hand over her head, while he grasped her pulse with the right.

"She has had a terrible blow," said he. "It must have been with some blunt weapon. Here is the place, behind the ear. But she is a woman of extraordinary physical powers. Her pulse is full and slow. There is no stertor. It is my belief that

she is merely stunned, and that she is in no danger at all."

"Thank God for that!"

"We must get her to bed. We shall carry her upstairs, and then I shall send my girls in to her. But who has done this?"

"Some robber," said Charles. "You see that



"Supporting his aunt's head upon his knee."

the window is open. She must have heard him and come down, for she was always perfectly fearless. I wish to goodness she had called me."

"But she was dressed."

"Sometimes she sits up very late."

"I did sit up very late," said a voice. She had opened her eyes, and was blinking at them in the lamp-light. "A villain came in through the window

and struck me with a life-preserver. You can tell the police so when they come; also, that it was a little fat man. Now, Charles, give me your arm, and I shall go upstairs."

But her spirit was greater than her strength, for, as she staggered to her feet, her head swam round, and she would have fallen again had her nephew not thrown his arms round her. They carried her upstairs among them, and laid her upon the bed, where the doctor watched beside her, while Charles went off to the police-station, and the Denvers mounted guard over the frightened maids.

CHAPTER XVII.

In Port at Last.



DAY had broken before the several denizens of "The Wilderness" had all returned to their homes, the police finished their inquiries, and all come back to its normal quiet. Mrs. Westmacott had been left sleeping peacefully, with a small chloral draught to steady her nerves, and a handkerchief soaked in arnica bound round her head. It was with some surprise, therefore, that the admiral received a note from her about ten o'clock, asking him to be good enough to step in to her. He hurried in, fearing that she might have taken some turn for the worse; but he was reassured to find her sitting up in her bed, with Clara and Ida Walker in attendance upon her. She had removed the handkerchief, and had put on a little cap with pink ribbons, and a maroon dressing-jacket, daintily fulled at the neck and sleeves.

"My dear friend," said she as he entered, "I wish to make a last few remarks to you. No, no," she continued laughing as she saw a look of dismay upon his face, "I shall not dream of dying for at least another thirty years. A woman should be

ashamed to die before she is seventy. I wish, Clara, that you would ask your father to step up. And you, Ida, just pass me my cigarettes, and open me a bottle of stout. Now then," she continued, as the doctor joined their party, "I don't quite know what I ought to say to you, admiral. You want some very plain speaking to."

"'Pon, my word, ma'am, I don't know what you are talking about."

"The idea of you, at your age, talking of going to sea, and leaving that dear patient little wife of yours at home who has seen nothing of you all her life! It's all very well for you. You have the life, and the change, and the excitement, but you don't think of her eating her heart out in a dreary London lodging. You men are all the same."

"Well, ma'am, since you know so much, you probably know also that I have sold my pension. How am I to live if I do not turn my hand to work?"

Mrs. Westmacott produced a large registered envelope from beneath the sheets and tossed it over to the old seaman.

"That excuse won't do. There are your pension papers. Just see if they are right."

He broke the seal, and out tumbled the very papers which he had made over to McAdam two days before.

"But what am I to do with these now?" he cried in bewilderment.

"You will put them in a safe place, or get a friend to do so, and, if you do your duty, you will go to your wife and beg her pardon for having even for an instant thought of leaving her."

The admiral passed his hand over his rugged forehead.

"This is very good of you, ma'am," said he, "very good and kind, and I know that you are a staunch friend; but for all that these papers mean money, and though we may have been in broken water of late, we are not quite in such straits as to have to signal to our friends. When we do, ma'am, there's no one we would look to sooner than to you."

"Don't be ridiculous," said the widow. "You know nothing whatever about it, and yet you stand there laying down the law. I'll have my way in the matter, and you shall take the papers; for it is no favour that I am doing you, but simply a restoration of stolen property."

"How's that, ma'am?"

"I am just going to explain, though you might take a lady's word for it without asking any questions. Now, what I am going to say is just between you four, and must go no farther. I have my own reasons for wishing to keep it from the police. Who do you think it was who struck me last night, admiral?"

"Some villain, ma'am. I don't know his name."

"But I do. It was the same man who ruined, or tried to ruin, your son. It was my only brother, Jeremiah."

"Ah!"

"I will tell you about him, or a little about him, for he has done much which I would not care to talk of nor you to listen to. He was always a villain, smooth-spoken and plausible, but a dangerous, subtle villain all the same. If I have some hard thoughts about mankind, I can trace them back to

the childhood which I spent with my brother. He is my only living relative, for my other brother, Charles's father, was killed in the Indian mutiny.

"Our father was rich, and when he died he made a good provision both for Jeremiah and for me. He knew Jeremiah and he distrusted him, however so instead of giving him all that he meant him to have he handed me over a part of it, telling me, with what was almost his dying breath, to hold it in trust for my brother, and to use it in his behalf when he should have squandered or lost all that he had. This arrangement was meant to be a secret between my father and myself, but unfortunately his words were overheard by the nurse, and she repeated them afterwards to my brother, so that he came to know that I held some money in trust for him. I suppose tobacco will not harm my head, doctor? Thank you, then I shall trouble you for the matches, Ida."

She lit a cigarette, and leaned back upon the pillow, with the blue wreaths curling from her lips.

"I cannot tell you how often he has attempted to get that money from me. He has bullied, cajoled, threatened, coaxed, done all that a man could do. I still held it, with the presentiment that a need for it would come. When I heard of this villainous business, his flight and his leaving his partner to face the storm—above all, that my old friend had been driven to surrender his income in order to make up for my brother's defalcations, I felt that now indeed I had a need for it. I sent in Charles yesterday to Mr. McAdam, and his client, upon hearing the facts of the case, very graciously consented to give back the papers and to take the money which he had advanced. Not a

word of thanks to me, admiral. I tell you that it was very cheap benevolence, for it was all done with his own money; and how could I use it better?

"I thought that I should probably hear from him soon, and I did. Last evening there was handed in a note of the usual whining, cringing tone. He had come back from abroad, at the risk of his life and liberty, just in order that he might say good-bye to the only sister he ever had, and to entreat my forgiveness for any pain which he had caused me. He would never trouble me again, and he begged only that I would hand over to him the sum which I held in trust for him. That, with what he had already, would be enough to start him as an honest man in the New World, when he would ever remember and pray for the dear sister who had been his saviour. That was the style of the letter, and it ended by imploring me to leave the window-latch open, and to be in the front room at three in the morning, when he would come to receive my last kiss and to bid me farewell.

"Bad as he was, I could not, when he trusted me, betray him. I said nothing, but I was there at the hour. He entered through the window, and implored me to give him the money. He was terribly changed: gaunt, wolfish, and spoke like a madman. I told him him that I had spent the money. He gnashed his teeth at me and swore it was his money. I told him that I had spent it on him. He asked me how. I said in trying to make him an honest man, and in repairing the results of his villainy. He shrieked out a curse, and pulling something out of the breast of his coat—a loaded stick, I think,—he struck me with it, and I remember nothing more."

"The blackguard!" cried the doctor; "but the police must be hot upon his track."

"I fancy not," Mrs. Westmacott answered calmly. "As my brother is a particularly tall thin man, and as the police are looking for a short fat one, I do not think that it is very probable that they will catch him. It is best, I think, that these little family matters should be adjusted in private."

"My dear ma'am," said the admiral, "if it is indeed this man's money that has bought back my pension, then I can have no scruples about taking it. You have brought sunshine upon us, ma'am, when the clouds were at their darkest, for here is my boy who insists upon returning the money which I got. He can keep it now to pay his debts. For what you have done I can only ask God to bless you, ma'am; and as to thanking you, I can't even——"

"Then pray don't try," said the widow. "Now run away, admiral, and make your peace with Mrs. Denver. I am sure, if I were she, it would be a long time before I should forgive you. As for me, I am going to America when Charles goes. You 'll take me so far, won't you, Ida? There is a college being built in Denver which is to equip the woman of the future for the struggle of life, and especially for her battle against man. Some months ago the committee offered me a responsible situation upon the staff, and I have decided now to accept it, for Charles's marriage removes the last tie which binds me to England. You will write to me sometimes, my friends, and you will address your letters to Professor Westmacott, Emancipation College, Denver. From there I shall watch how the glorious

struggle goes in conservative old England, and if I am needed you will find me here again fighting in the forefront of the fray. Good-bye!—but not you, girls; I have still a word I wish to say to you.

"Give me your hand, Ida, and yours, Clara," said she, when they were alone. "Oh, you naughty little pusses! aren't you ashamed to look me in the face? Did you think—did you really think that I was so very blind, and could not see your little plot? You did it



"Aren't you ashamed to look me in the face?"

very well, I must say that; and really I think that I like you better as you are. But you had all your pains for nothing, you little conspirators, for I give you my word that I had quite made up my mind not to have him."

And so within a few weeks our little ladies, from their observatory, saw a mighty bustle in "The Wilderness" when two-horse carriages came, and coachmen with favours, to bear away the twos who were destined

to come back one. And they themselves, in their crackling silk dresses, went across, as invited, to the big double wedding breakfast, which was held in the house of Doctor Walker. Then there was health-drinking, and tears and laughter, and changing of dresses, and rice-throwing, when the carriages drove up again, and two more couples started on that journey which ends only with life itself.

Charles Westmacott is now a flourishing ranchman in the western part of Texas, where he and his sweet little wife are the two most popular persons in all that county. Of their aunt they see little, but from time to time they see notices in the papers that there is a focus of light in Denver, where mighty thunderbolts are being forged which will one day bring the dominant sex upon their knees. The admiral and his wife still live at number one, while Harold and Clara have taken number two, where Doctor Walker continues to reside. As to the business, it had been re-constructed, and the energy and ability of the junior partner had soon made up for all the ill that had been done by his senior. Yet with his sweet and refined home atmosphere he is able to realise his wish, and to keep himself free from the sordid aims and base ambitions which drag down the man whose business lies too exclusively in the money market of the vast Babylon. As he goes back every evening from the crowds of Throgmorton Street to the tree-lined peaceful avenues of Norwood, so he has found it possible in spirit also to do one's duties amidst the babel of the City, and yet to live beyond it.

THE END.

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